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TO FIGHT AND WIN:
A CULTURAL AUDIT OF THE BRITISH ARMY
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ABSTRACT

In July 2021, the House of Commons Defence Committee released the Atherton report on the experiences of females in the British Army. The Report recorded the poor treatment of female service-personnel who are disproportionately subjected to bullying, discrimination and harassment. This Audit was commissioned to analyse how poor cultures had generated inappropriate behaviours in the British Army and how those behaviours might be improved. The remit was broad. However, in the context of the Atherton Report, the Audit focuses exclusively on the experience of female service-personnel in the British Army, in order to reduce discrimination in the Army and to facilitate the integration of women.

The central problem which this Audit identifies is that because 90 per cent of the Army consists of men, it is coded male. The norms and expectations of male soldiers are masculine. This is seriously disadvantageous to women who are prejudged and classified differently. The MOD is currently implementing a policy to resolve the issue of male coding; by 2030, 30 per cent of recruits coming into the Armed Forces should be female. In the civilian sector, once a minority group in an organisation reaches 30 per cent, individuals in this class are no longer tokens and many of the problems of discrimination disappear; norms and expectations change.

However, although the aim of 30 per cent female is coherent in theory, it is very unlikely that the Army will ever be able to reach this target. No all-volunteer, professional Army has ever got close to this figure; the US Army, which has integrated most fully, has reached 15 per cent female. The Canadian Army, which integrated fully in 1989, is 13 per cent female. Even conscript armies, like the ground forces of the Israeli Defence Force, fail to get close to 30 per cent female.

Since the current policy is unlikely to work, other reforms are necessary if female integration is to be improved. Cognisant of the distinctive culture of the British Army, this Audit identifies a series of reforms which are more likely to be successful. In place of the impracticability of the 30:30 policy, a more radical programme of renewal is required. The Audit argues that various practices which currently disadvantage women need to be addressed urgently; predation needs to be eliminated. However, the Audit ultimately proposes that a thorough re-invigoration of the professional ethos of the British Army may

be the most effect way of integrating female service personnel. The British Army needs to re-code itself from a masculine institution into a hyper-professional force. It needs to re-code itself military.

Chapter 1

THE ARMY'S PREDICAMENT

1.1. Context

On 25 July 2021, the House of Commons Defence Committee published a report on the experience of female service-personnel in the armed forces, *Protecting those who protect us*: the Atherton Report.[1] On the basis of a survey of 3,000 women in the forces and interviews with eleven serving or retired females, the Report recorded, that while many females enjoyed their service and 9 out of 10 would recommend the armed forces as a career, women faced grave obstacles in the armed forces. They were the disproportionate victims of bullying, discrimination and harassment and were routinely subjected to disparaging, offensive, and sometimes obscene abuse. Although the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were by no means perfect working environments for women, the Army was singled out by the Report as especially problematic. In November 2021, the Secretary of State for Defence, the Right Honourable Ben Wallace MP, summoned the Chief of the General Staff and other senior Army commanders to a meeting to discuss the issue of female integration. It was later reported in the press that, unconvinced by the urgency of their response, he reprimanded them and ordered them to initiate a plan to improve the experience of female service-personnel in the Army. It was a deeply uncomfortable meeting for senior Army leaders.[2]

The Atherton Report and the subsequent ministerial admonition were awkward moments for the Army's leadership. Unfortunately, they were by no means the only difficulties which the Army had recently experienced. On the contrary, since withdrawing from combat operations Afghanistan, the Army seems to be the victim of a series of damaging events. In March 2017, a major-general was found guilty of

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1 House of Commons Defence Committee *Protecting those who Protect Us: women in the armed forces from recruitment to civilian life*, July 2021. https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/24/defence-committee/news/156892/report-protecting-those-who-protect-us-women-in-the-armed-forces-from-recruitment-to-civilian-life/. See also: MOD Report on Inappropriate Behaviours (The Wigston Report), July 2019 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wigston-review-into-inappropriate-behaviours; MOD *Unacceptable Behaviour: progress review* (The Danuta Gray Report), November 2020 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/941813/20201204-Unacceptable_behaviours-progress_review_2020_Public_for_DDC.pdf

2 Interview 5.

defrauding the Ministry of Defence regarding Continuity of Education Allowance. He was given a 21-month sentence. A lieutenant-colonel was also found guilty of the same offense. In the last year, three brigade commanders were removed from post. In November 2021, the family of a woman, Agnes Wanjiru, allegedly murdered by British soldiers in Kenya over a decade ago, sued the MOD. In June 2021, at least 16 soldiers were referred to an anti-extremist scheme for their connections to far right groups. The Army should not be condemned because of the deviant behaviour of some individual soldiers and officers but the confluence of so many issues within a few months has created a very unfortunate impression.

The problems faced by the Army extend well beyond the behaviour of its personnel, though. On 16 March 2021, the *Integrated Review* was published, followed a week later by the *Defence Command Paper*. The *Integrated Review* in particular, was widely praised as a coherent and ambitious statement about the UK's strategic posture after Brexit. It sought to integrate defence and security with diplomacy, development and commerce in a way which no previous report had attempted. In the light of the hard Brexit and the re-erection of borders with the EU, it logically pointed to the Indo-Pacific as an increasingly important sphere for the UK. The *Defence Command Paper* was similarly praised for its vision. Yet, it is believed by some soldiers that the Army struggled to articulate a clear or convincing role for itself in the *Integrated Review*: 'Unlike the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, whose propositions demonstrated an enviable focus and clarity, the Army did not provide a convincing summary of the key tasks it exists to perform'.[3] Although the threat from Russia was highlighted, it must be admitted that the Army was in a more difficult situation than the other services here. After the controversies and costs of Iraq and Afghanistan, the government already preferred strategic options which avoided continental entanglements.[4] *The Integrated Review* and the *Defence Command Paper*, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, prioritised the Royal Navy with its carriers and nuclear submarines, the Royal Air Force with its F-35s, and invested in new technologies under Strategic Command.[5] The Army's overall budget was reduced as

3 https://wavellroom.com/2021/04/09/good-bad-and-ugly-the-british-army-and-the-integrated-review/

4 https://www.economist.com/britain/2020/09/15/britains-armed-forces-get-ready-for-a-revolution

5 *Global Britain in a Competitive Age, 2021* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy; MOD *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 2021. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974661/CP411_-Defence_Command_Plan.pdf

a result of significant reductions in its workforce. The Army was cut by circa 9,000 regular soldiers from 82,000 to 73,333 by 2025: a reduction of 12 per cent. In addition, its armoured capability was reduced from over 250 Challenger 2 tanks to, by 2027, 148 Challenger 3 tanks, including its training fleet. A number of heavy artillery systems will be phased out on the promise of new equipment. As a result of these cuts, the review seemed to disadvantage the Army[6]: 'the army is smarting from brutal cuts in the defence review'.[7]

The Army has not always helped itself here. It has mismanaged some of the programmes which it has been awarded. The Ajax saga was, of course, the prime example here. The British Army had committed itself to procuring the Ajax armoured vehicle as an advanced reconnaissance platform soon after withdrawing from Afghanistan. By 2021, the Army had invested £3 billion in the project; the total cost would probably be £5 billion. Yet, in July 2021, it transpired that the vehicle was flawed. Due to excessive noise and vibration, it was permanently damaging the hearing of operators. It was completely un-serviceable and all trials were stopped. It seems that some senior Army management knew of these problems as early as 2018 but somehow ignored them. The inquiry into Ajax is a sobering read.[8] It is possible that Ajax might be brought into service by 2030. With the delays to Boxer, due in part to sub-optimal management, the Army currently has no replacement for the Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicle. It, therefore, will have no credible armoured infantry fighting vehicle until beyond 2030.

Although the British Army's units performed well – and in some cases outstandingly - in very difficult circumstances throughout the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, the credibility of British Army leadership was once again questioned by these operations. This is certainly unfair as commanders from the other services were also culpable; Air Chief Marshal Jock Stirrup served as CDS in that crucial period from 2006 to 2009; he was sanctioned in the Chilcot Inquiry.[9] Royal Marines

6 https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/03/22/who-are-the-winners-and-losers-in-britains-new-defense-review/; For a longer discussion of the benefits and risks of the Integrated Review and Defence Command Paper for the Army: See Simon Anglim 'Global Britain, Global Army? The Review and Land Warfare' https://www.kcl.ac.uk/warstudies/assets/ir-in-context-defence-and-security-in-focus.pdf, 16-23

7 https://www.economist.com/britain/2021/10/14/british-defence-strategy-is-undergoing-a-naval-tilt

8 The Comptroller and Auditor General *The Ajax Report* (London: MOD, 2022), https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Ajax-programme.pdf

9 House of Commons, *Report of the Iraq Inquiry* (2016) http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/247921/the-report-of-the-iraq-inquiry_executive-summary.pdf, 105.

played a major role in the Iraq invasion and in subsequent operations in Helmand but there was a major controversy around a war crime during Herrick XIII. Nevertheless, the general perception is otherwise; it has focused on Army failings. From 2004-8, British Army commanders mishandled Basra and, then from 2005, became distracted by Helmand, which they regarded as a potentially more popular war. While British soldiers always fought well in Helmand, the first four years of the campaign in that Province were chaotic. Army leadership has been the subject to voluminous criticisms for its handling of these campaigns.[10] Some of these commentaries may have been polemical but, together, they have damaged the Army's reputation. They have created an atmosphere of crisis around the Army.

Recent events seem only to have affirmed the Army's difficulties. In May 2021, President Biden ordered a final withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. It was always likely that the Taliban would take this retreat, initiated by President Trump the year before, as an opportunity to expand their influence; it was likely that some provinces would fall. Yet, it was presumed that the regime would endure. In fact, the Ashraf Ghani regime collapsed almost immediately. Always hostile to Ghani, Abdullah Abdullah, local warlords and powerbrokers realigned with the Taliban, disbanding the already depleted Afghan Army. The Taliban was able to march on Kabul in two months and by August, it had seized the capital and taken control. In the face of this unforeseen crisis, a major evacuation operation was necessary. The Army was not in any way responsible for the fall of Kabul. However, the complete failure of the Afghanistan campaign deeply upset many serving soldiers and re-ignited concerns about the wisdom of investing so heavily in Helmand in the first place, where 457 personnel died between 2006 and 2013. By 2022, the Army seemed to have lost two campaigns. In 2022, the Army is in a predicament. It is now smaller than it has been for over two hundred and fifty years. The Atherton Report, Ajax, Afghanistan, Iraq and various other scandals involving soldiers have eroded the reputation of senior Army leadership. It was in this context that the Secretary of State's reprimand over the experience of females was possible.

10 E.g. Simon Akam *The Changing of the Guard* (London: Scribe 2021); Theo Farrell *Unwinnable* (London: Bodley Head 2017); Ben Barry *Blood, Metal and Dust* (Oxford: Osprey 2020); Frank Ledwidge *Losing Small Wars* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011); Daniel Marston 'Operation Telic XIII to XI: difficulties of twenty-first century command' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44(1) 2021, pp. 63-90.

Nevertheless, despite its tribulations over the last decade, the Army is still a robust and capable organisation of which British citizens are rightly proud. It remains a vital public organisation, central to the security and defence of this country and to its international standing. For instance, during the Covid pandemic, the Army played a key, but often thankless, role in supporting the NHS. It did so professionally and without complaint. As the first wave of Covid struck in March 2020, a logistics brigade constructed Nightingale hospitals with great efficiency. The Army continued to play a key role throughout the pandemic, deploying personnel to test and then to vaccinate the population. At the same time, it supported the government by providing drivers during the fuel crisis of 2021. No other civilian public service could have performed this work; neither the police, nor fire brigade had any capacity to support the public in this way. They are smaller than the Army, but neither the RAF nor the Royal Navy contributed nearly so much to the Covid crisis.

The Army has not only proved itself capable of providing assistance to civilian powers. Despite the evident problems of procurement and cuts, it remains operationally capable. It has deployed personnel to Kabul, to Iraq, to Mali and many other locations in support of local forces. In Mali, British troops have endured arduous conditions as part of the UN mission; including fire-fights with insurgents in 2021. The British Army has also demonstrated that it can react effectively to crisis. In August 2021, it was able to mount Operation Pitting, the Kabul evacuation, at very short notice. Troops from 16 Air Assault Brigade deployed rapidly into a complex and potentially very dangerous situation in Kabul. The operation was commanded adeptly and the soldiers at Kabul International Airport conducted themselves with professionalism and humanity.[11] The care which they showed to Afghan refugees was widely praised, but their tactical skills were no less significant to the success of the operation. For instance, in response to a warning of an imminent suicide attack, paratroopers were ordered to clear one of the gates to the airfield. They completed this task and then, knowing the risks, rapidly retreated behind barricades.[12] Unfortunately, their US Marine colleagues were less agile. They delayed their withdrawal and were caught by the suicide bomber; nine were killed. In this way, the individual soldering skill of paratroopers saved the government from the inevitable

11 https://news.sky.com/story/afghanistan-british-soldiers-rush-to-aid-baby-in-blistering-heat-at-kabul-airport-12386254; https://www.army.mod.uk/news-and-events/news/2021/08/airborne-soldiers-praised-for-afghanistan-evacuation/

12 https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9956383/British-soldiers-SAVED-decision-ISIS-suicide-bomb-Kabul-airport.html

political pressure which would have followed had Operation Pitting incurred casualties. Operation Pitting demonstrated the enduring skills and strengths of the British Army at its finest. Operationally and tactically, it was a superbly executed mission. Indeed, the performance of the armed forces and the Army has been highlighted by a damning Parliamentary Report on the evacuation, *Missing in Action*.[13] That report excoriates the Government and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office for their multiple failings during the crisis. Yet, the UK's armed forces, with the Army at the forefront, stepped into the gap and despite a complete lack of guidance were still able to rescue 18,000 British and Afghan civilians without a single casualty.

The Army is not a failed institution, then. On the contrary, its personnel are still excellent; it is a hard-working, professional and capable organisation. It is respected by NATO Allies, including the US and France. However, the simultaneity of so many problems cannot be ignored; they are not just a coincidence. They suggest that the Army is in a serious predicament. Minimally, the Army seems to be at a critical point. It has reached a moment where far-reaching reforms may be necessary to address fundamental organisational tensions and deficits.

1.1. A Haldane Moment

The Atherton Report was a sobering moment for the Army and its leadership. However, the Atherton Report has to be read in the light of much wider concerns about the Army. It would be easy to classify the poor experience of female soldiers and officers as a micro-cultural issue which says nothing about the state of the wider Army. When it is aligned with the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, Ajax, and frequent individual misbehaviour, the issue of female integration is not only a problem in itself, but also a symptom. It is an indication of a wider malaise in the Army: a warning signal. There is a precedent for this. In his report on the Nimrod crash of 2006, Charles Haddon Cave QC compared that tragedy with a series of other major disaster: the Columbia Space Shuttle (2003), Zeebrugge Disaster (1987), the King's Cross Fire (1987), The Marchioness (1989) and the BP Texas City (2005). Before each of these disasters, organisations had ignored warning signs. Problems had been reduced to minor technical issues:

13 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmfaff/169/report.html

> When causal chains are limited to technical flaws and individual failure, the ensuing responses aimed at preventing a similar event in the future are equally limited: they aim to fix the technical problem and replace or retrain the individual responsible. Such corrections lead to a misguided and potentially disastrous belief that the underlying problem has been solved.[14]

The Army has not yet had a disaster of the type that befell NASA, Townsend Thoresen or the London Underground, but if major reforms are not undertaken in the light of the Atherton Report, it may be at risk of having one. Senior leadership in the Army, the MOD and wider government need to understand the Army's predicament of the today. They need to understand the stresses and pressures which the Army is under and that this vital public organisation may now be in serious jeopardy. It cannot continue with the practices, procedures and presumptions which worked for a large Army of over hundred thousand for a force of only 73,000. It is necessary to identify the wider organisational causes of poor behaviour in barracks and, above all, to highlight what has been neglected by the Army, so that bullying and harassment has been allowed to continue at unit level.

Indeed, in the light of Ukraine, it is imperative that the British Army is a credible force capable of conducting high-intensity land operations against a peer, in support of its allies. It might be argued that since the end of the Cold War the British Army has had the luxury of conducting campaigns, which, with US, support, it could not possibly lose - at least on the battlefield. That is no longer the case. As Russia's woeful performance in the early weeks of the Ukraine War showed, a poorly equipped, badly commanded and ill-trained army will not only be incapable of achieving national strategic objectives but, as it is defeated, it will also suffer terrible losses. In Ukraine, the Putin regime has itself admitted heavy losses. Since the start of the war, the US estimate that 10,000 or 15,000 Russian soldiers may have been killed. That equates to between 30-50,000 soldiers wounded. Approximately 15 per cent of the assault forces has been attritted in three months of fighting. These figures should be sobering reading for the MOD, the government, and for the British Army.

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14 Charles Haddon-Cave, QC *The Nimrod Review: An independent review into the broader issues surrounding the loss of the RAF Nimrod MR2 Aircraft XV230 in Afghanistan in 2006* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/229037/1025.pdf, 448.

In any future conflict, the British Army may be at risk of suffering catastrophic losses, if its problems and shortfalls are not addressed.

Of course, even if a reinvigoration and reform of the Army is urgently required, it is necessary to keep in mind the Army's special role and its distinctive culture and traditions. Whatever else it may do, the British Army is designed to defend the UK. Its mission is to fight the UK's wars on land. It has performed that role since the seventeenth century. Of course, those campaigns have been diverse. British troops in Helmand were involved in an intense counter-insurgency operation, which differed dramatically from the predecessors fighting Germany in the Second World War. Yet, the British Army is uniquely tasked to apply extreme force – to kill its enemies - on the battlefield in pursuit of the UK's strategic objectives. As a result, the Army must be able to train its personnel to be tough, resilient and aggressive. Ultimately, they must be able to prosecute extreme violence, when legally called upon to do so.

As the Audit makes very clear, this mission cannot excuse the poor treatment of female service personnel, as it has regrettably sometimes been used to. However, the Army's mission has generated a professional culture which is distinct from civilian society. Like all professions, the Army must rightly align itself with existing diversity and equality legislation. In an increasingly multicultural society, it must be actively inclusive; females and minorities groups have to participate fully in it. It must be a fair and equitable employer. Yet, although the British Army must be consistent with the legal and ethical norms of civil society, it may be an exaggeration to say that the Army must *reflect* society, its demographics and its norms absolutely. Few public sector organisations do that, in fact. Indeed, expert professional groups normally recruit from discrete milieus and develop their own highly distinctive cultures in response to their specialisms. The Professional Footballer's Association is an inclusive organisation in line with British culture, but its membership is hardly representative of the UK as a whole; indeed, even the NHS is not objectively representative. The very specialism of a professional organisation often precludes it from reflecting 'society' and its generic demographics in any simple, immediate way. Of course, professional groups themselves also differ vastly from each other. This Audit recognises that because of its unique mission, the British Army has a distinctive professional culture.

However, even accepting the Army's distinctiveness, if the Atherton Report is indeed a symptom of a wider crisis, this Audit advocates a more general renovation

of the professional ethos of the Army. There may be some useful historical precedents for the Army here. The nearest parallel is, perhaps, the Haldane Reforms of 1906-1912. After the disasters of the Second Boer War and in the light of a growing continental threat from the German Empire, Edward Haldane, the Secretary of State for War, implemented a series of reforms based on the report of the Esher Committee, to modernise the Army and prepare it for a possible war against the German Empire.[15] The First World War was a scarring experience for all the belligerents but the performance of the six divisions of the British Expeditionary Force in the battles of late 1914 vindicated Haldane's reforms. It may be useful to understand the predicament of the Army in 2022 as a Haldane moment. Minor amendments will not be enough. A profound renovation of the Army is needed. The alternative is that, without fundamental reform, the British Army may descend to the levels more commonly associated with the land forces of the minor European powers. If the Army wishes to remain recognisable as the *British* Army, consistent with its history and traditions, major changes are necessary now.

Senior leadership has recognised the risks the Army's faces and have sought to address some of them. For instance, *Future Soldier* provides an eloquent description of the Army's new structures within existing personnel and budgetary constraints. In response to the Atherton Report, the current CGS initiated Operation Teamwork, which was viewed with scepticism inside and outside the Army. It has been a successful endeavour (and will be discussed below). The Army is trying to re-capitalise its fleet with Challenger 3 etc. It has put £800 million pounds into accommodation. The Futures Directorate and the Director of Land Warfare are currently trying to institute a better, more realistic and challenging regime of training in the Army. They are trying to develop a credible doctrine which will optimise the Army's war-fighting capabilities within its resources so that the Army can fulfil its NATO obligations. Many have criticised the Army for the fact that it has removed several senior officers from command in the last two years. Although it shows the promotion system still needs work, it would be more appropriate to see these removals as a determination by senior leadership to improve the British Army.

15 Brian Bond *The Victorian Army and the Staff College 1854-1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), 212-239; Hew Strachan *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

This report actively builds upon these developments. It seeks to advance and amplify the reforms as the army addresses the question of female integration into the Army. To this end, its principal focus is, of course, the experience of female service personnel. It looks at the culture in which discrimination arises. However, it situates the various difficulties which female service-personnel have faced – the abuse, bullying, harassment and sometimes assault – in a much wider organisational context. It is therefore certainly an audit of British Army culture but one that conceives 'culture' in its widest sense. I have written this Report with the view that it should begin a wider debate in the Army and the MOD about how the Army might be renovated and re-invigorated, precisely at the moment when the threat has increased. As a NATO member, the UK and its allies require an effective British Army, capable of high-intensity war-fighting. The Ukraine War has shown the necessity of capable land forces more than ever. By taking the question of female integration as a symptom, not just an isolated problem, this Report aims to contribute to the reform of the British Army. It aims to help the British Army fight and win – not just the battle against female bullying, discrimination and harassment, but to fight and win on the battlefield itself.

The central claim of the Report is that the Army needs to be re-coded. At the moment, the culture of the Army is coded male, because most soldiers are men, hence the expectations and norms of the Army are predominantly masculine. Since a major increase in female recruitment is unlikely, the best way of re-coding itself may be by re-professionalising the Army itself, moving from a male focus to a military code, without reference to any gender. If it were hyper-masculine in the past, it needs become hyper-professional today. Women are likely to be most effectively integrated through the creation of competent, cohesive, professional military teams. Consequently, rather than seeing combat effectiveness and female integration as separate, maybe even antithetical parts of a war-fighting military culture, this report tries to align them. This Audit proposes that a reinforced professional culture may be the most effective way of integrating women; enhanced professionalism will also improve the Army's operational effectiveness.

Of course, many claims in this report are controversial. They may be unwelcome to some – perhaps to many. Some will contest my interpretations and recommendations; it is important that they do so. This report should not be read as a prescription of what must happen, rather it is intended to highlight key areas of

concern which the Army should focus upon. The Report is an invitation to an open debate in the Army about how it should reform itself. However, it might also be noted that while the interpretation forwarded in this Report are of course my own, they are based on a deep and wide engagement with serving personnel. This Report tries to represent their views honestly, even brutally, to senior leadership. This Report cannot claim to be completely correct on every point, but it has tried to communicate the actual experience of soldiers and officers in the Army today as faithfully and fully as possible. That experience should be the starting point of any debate about what the Army needs to do.

Chapter 2
Methodology

2.1. The Remit

Following CGS's meeting with the Secretary of State in November 2021, the Army was instructed to address the question of the female experience in the Army. Operation Teamwork, when the entire Army stood down to consider the issue of inclusion, in February 2022 was a major part of this work. However, the Secretary of State also directed the Army to commission a written report into cultures and behaviours: the Army Culture Audit. In January 2022, I was contacted about whether I might be able to conduct this report and on 4 February, I was given my written Terms of Reference. It may be useful to lay out those terms of reference here.

The Terms of Reference recognised an improvement in Army culture and inclusivity but identified the need for an objective, external report to help the Army develop the work it had already initiated:

> The Army's culture is being improved through a structured programme of interventions through The Army Teamwork Plan. However, there is seemingly slow progress in reducing unacceptable behaviours. There is evidence that suggests there is a worsening trend of sexualised behaviours and for some members of the Army, particularly those who are in minority groups, their treatment sometimes falls short of what is expected. Between January and June 2022 an independent Audit team will provide critical analysis of current Army Culture.

The aim of the Audit was laid out clearly:

> The aim of the audit is to ensure that the Army's culture is aligned to its strategy and is reflected in the actions, leadership, risk appetite, policies and decisions throughout the Army.
>
> The Audit team will identify how the Army can revise its culture to maximise the potential of its personnel and increase operational effectiveness. The Audit will culminate in a written report that is to identify the causes of cultural

barriers to operational effectiveness; weighting, prioritising and contextualising (through quantitative and qualitive analysis) each specific example.

In the first instance, the Audit which I was commissioned to write addressed the question of the behaviours in the Army generally and especially the bullying, discrimination and harassment of experienced by some female, minority, and, indeed, male service-personnel. The aim was to assist in creating a culture in which all personnel might thrive. This was a very broad remit.

However, in the light of the Atherton report and the report's delivery date, it was necessary to narrow the empirical focus.[16] Since the question of female integration had initiated this Audit in the first place, I made the decision to prioritise this question. This report, therefore, addresses only the experience of female personnel. It analyses the bullying, discrimination, and harassment of female service-personnel. By narrowing the Terms of Reference to the single question of the female experience, it has been possible to write a clearer and more coherent report. However, even though this report does not explicitly address the question of ethnic minorities in the Army, I would suggest that many of the findings about female personnel would extend to those groups too.[17] The recommendations of this Audit might be applied to ethnic personnel too.

This Report was commissioned as a Culture Audit. However, in the light of the other issues which the Army currently faces, it quickly became obvious that a much wider perspective was essential. Consequently, while I had to explain why poor behaviours have happened and offer some mitigations for them, it was necessary to identify wider organisational tensions which facilitated them. In many cases, the tensions were not always immediately causal, but it would have been wrong to ignore their influence in creating an environment which was disadvantageous to women. To do the Army Culture Audit justice, it was in fact necessary to conduct what is in effect a critical analysis – a sociology - of the Army itself as an organisation, examining its structures, processes and practices.

16 The Audit was commissioned on 4 February. The final revision was completed on 31 May 2022.

17 See Anthony King 'Decolonizing the British Army' *International Affairs* 97 (2) March 2021, 443–461. In this piece, I discuss discrimination against ethnic minorities at length and the parallels with the female experience are highlighted.

From the outset, it was obvious that this was a demanding task. If I were going to be able to identify fundamental organisational problems which have facilitated the kind of unfortunate behaviours of which females have been the recipient, a wide-ranging investigation was required. It was essential to interview women service-personnel. However, it was also necessary to gain an understanding of personnel across the Army. To understand the Army as a single corporate entity, even in all its diversity, it was necessary to engage across the force. It was necessary to gather evidence in the three main parts of the Army: The Field Army, training establishments and the Army Headquarters. The Field Army, as the largest and most important element of the army, was the focus of the research. It was plainly impossible to engage with every unit in the Field Army. Consequently, I interviewed a selection of units from across the combat functions: the combat arms (infantry and armour), combat support (engineers and artillery), command support (signals), and combat service support (logistics and REME). I specified some units, with which I wanted to engage on the basis of their specialist role, or because they seemed to highlight the question of female integration most clearly. However, for the most part, the Field Army's Land Operations Centre identified the units with which I would engage, on the basis of their availability and their willingness to talk to me. I conducted interviews and focus groups with selected units from the combat arms, combat support arms, command signal and combat service support from 3rd UK Division, 1st UK Division, and 16 Air Assault Brigade. At the selected units, I ran separate focus groups for officers, senior non-commissioned officers, junior non-commissioned officers, privates and for females of all ranks. In mixed groups, subordinate ranks defer to their seniors and the findings tended to be skewed. I also conducted similar focus groups at a Phase 1 training establishment and an all-female focus group from Intermediate and Command Staff Course (Land). I also interviewed officers at Army Headquarters and conducted a focus group with a selection of majors at the Headquarters. I engaged the Army's LGBT Network. I also interviewed a Reserve unit, although the question of the Reserves, vital though it is, is not addressed in this Report.

The Terms of Reference asked me to identify the causes of poor behaviours by quantitative and qualitative analyses. There are some basic statistics in this report about the demography of the Army. They are important in understanding the

incidence of bullying. However, there is no refined quantitative analysis in this Audit. I do not identify or quantify discrete independent and dependent variables. As my previous research on the armed forces shows, I am a qualitative social scientist, rather than a quantitative one.[18] My work seeks to explain specific types of practice by reference to the wider social context, rather than by reference to quantified causal variables. Participants' own shared understanding and collective definitions of their situations are critical here – because they are constitutive of that social context. These understandings are recovered most effectively by observation and discussion. Consequently, replicating the method I have successfully employed on previous research projects, I conducted this Audit my means of interviews and focus groups.

In both interviews and focus groups, I adopted an open style of interviewing. After a short introduction of my purpose, I allowed the participants to set the agenda and to talk to the topics which were important to them. I steered the group discussions gently in the directions which I thought important but for the most part I let the conversations flow. I recorded the discussion in a notebook, on the basis of which the quotations in the report are drawn. I was concerned that it would be difficult to get young soldiers to talk. Yet, in all but one group, this was not a problem. Interviewees happily discussed their issues till the end of the session; the focus groups lasted one hour. In several cases, the participants continued to talk to me after the end of the session and in others emphasised that they had enjoyed the opportunity to talk. All interviewees and focus groups were assured complete anonymity. Consequently, all the quotations and evidence from these discussions are referenced by an interview number: 1 to 80. To preserve anonymity, I recorded the discussion of the focus groups not the specific discussant, so the focus group, not the individual is referenced in the footnotes. The result was a voluminous and rich archive of evidence.

In all, I conducted 40 focus groups and 41 individual interviews with selected personnel: 502 service personnel in total (see Table 1). It was a very rich sample.

18 See for instance, Anthony King *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), *The Combat Soldier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), *Command* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

Interviewees	Number	Percentage
Total	502	100
Female	96	19.2
Male	406	80.8
Officers	139 (52 females)	27 (38.2)
Other Ranks	363 (44 females)	72.7 (12)

Table 1: The Sample: Interviewees and Focus Groups

However, this table – and the sample - need some explaining. There seems to be a potential anomaly. This Audit focuses on the female experience and, yet, women represent a minority of my sample: 19.2 per cent. There is an explanation for this. In order to gain an insight into the culture of the Army, it was important to engage, not just with females, who are sometimes its victim, but with the male majority, which overwhelmingly defines military culture. I wanted to try to understand how the conditions might be created for bullying and discrimination in the Army, even though many males formally opposed it. That required engaging with male soldiers. Moreover, although I interviewed 41 individuals independently, I wanted to engage with Army personnel in their units; I wanted to talk to personnel, who actually worked together, to understand the specific culture and climate of their unit. Since twenty of the focus groups were drawn from the combat arms or combat support arms, it was inevitable that there would be a male bias in my sample. There are very few females in these arms. Fourteen focus groups were all male, but women were in the minority in nineteen mixed groups. I compensated for this under-representation with seven all female groups. Consequently, although only 19.2 per cent of my sample was female, this is significantly higher than the actual proportion of females in the Army; 12 per cent of the Army is currently female. Moreover, 96 female interlocutors is a reasonable sample and, I believed, vindicated by the quality of the material. The

Atherton Report, for instance, surveyed 3000 female service-personnel but interviewed 11 female witnesses.

No research is ever comprehensive. However, the size and the diversity of my sample both in terms of function and rank suggest that the evidence which I gathered was reliable. I spoke to logisticians and to paratroopers, with the Chief of the General Staff and with privates, sappers, and signallers and with every rank in between. Indeed, the remarkable point about my fieldwork was the unprompted similarity between the themes which arose in both interviews and focus groups. The experiences – and, in fact, in some cases the attitudes – of interlocutors were extraordinarily similar. The interviews and focus groups corroborated each other very closely.[19]

Indeed, so honest were the discussions, it is important that I highlight a methodological caution. While military personnel are often reluctant to talk openly with the superiors, external interlocutors outside the chain of command sometimes take on the role of confessors. Serving personnel express views and feelings which the chain of command never hears. It is easy to assume that the external observer is receiving the definitive truth. Certainly, unacknowledged realities can be revealed in this process. However, just as the reticence of personnel to express themselves to their superiors cannot be taken as evidence that all is well in a unit, neither can every claim or complaint articulated to an external interviewer be assumed to be automatically correct. In this context, complaints might be exaggerated, counter-vailing experiences ignored. There is a well-known aphorism in the Army that officers need only worry about their soldiers when they stop complaining. Several senior officers warned me about complaining which they regarded as corrosive. Indeed, there was some evidence that some of the statements I heard might have been personal grievance rather than grounded discontent. For instance, in one focus group, a soldier complained vociferously that the food served by a private contractor was terrible.[20] His commanding officer, who ate regularly to check its quality, demurred; he insisted, with plausible evidence, that the food, while perhaps not of

19 In interviews and focus groups with females, it was difficult to determine definitively exactly when most incidents had occurred. This Report records the experience of female service-personnel over the course of their service. Since most females were in junior ranks, the descriptions overwhelmingly refer to experiences in the last five to ten years.

20 Interview 49.

restaurant quality, was more than adequate and reasonably priced.[21] There were many other examples of individual grievances which I ignored. However, in the course of this research, a significant level of concern was communicated to me about the Army. I have filtered these claims into the plausible and important issues, rather than focusing on specific individual grievances which might have been exaggerated in the context of a discussion. The evidence is not definitive, then. It never is. However, given the range of interviewees and the detail of the conversations, it is a good sample from which to assess the current condition of Army culture.

2.2. Defining Culture

This report is an audit of British Army culture. Consequently, it is necessary to define the term culture at the outset. This is not easy as the word culture is deceptive. Apparently obvious, it has, in fact, many different meanings and connotations. Indeed, the cultural critic Raymond Williams claimed that that the word culture was one of the most complex in the English language.[22] It can refer to the highest products of a civilization, to theatre, to the arts, to museums, to religion, ideas, beliefs, norms, or to the most mundane everyday customs, like table-manners. All have been called culture.

What is culture? In its broadest sense, culture refers simply to all human activities and artefacts which are not natural. Anything which is not the product of genetics and evolution, is culture. Culture is everything that humans learn. The problem here is that, as sophisticated social animals, everything humans do, beyond basic biological responses, is learned. Even our most apparently private acts are learnt; they are cultural. Moreover, since everything we do is learned from others, all our practices are finally collective, shared activities. Culture refers to a set of collective practices which unite and define a social group. Culture is what we do together, then. Culture typically refers, then, to all the normalised practices which a human community conduct, both formally and informally, publicly, and privately. It

21 Interview 55.

22 Raymond Williams *Culture* (London: Fontana 1987), p.76

involves language, beliefs, ideas, customs, values, actions etc. It refers, above all, to the regular, routinised, repeated practices which generate, sustain and, indeed, constitute a stable social order. We might say that the culture of society or community is the grand sum of all its practices.

This definition of culture may be philosophically sustainable, but it presents obvious analytical problems. If everything is necessarily cultural, then, the term culture is not very useful as an analytical category. It is too broad a term to provide a satisfactory explanation of any specific human action. It is not very useful to suggest that a specific behaviour is the product of culture – since everything a human does is. It is a tautology. Consequently, to analyse a culture, it is more effective to focus on specific practices. It is better to try and explain why and how specific practices occur. Indeed, in most successful studies, this is precisely what scholars do. They do not look at culture in general but at specific practices which they try to explain by reference to the social and historic context.

The question is how to explain those practices. It is possible here to invoke culture. A pattern of practices is the product of an underlying culture. Practices normally rely on a set of presumptions and beliefs which a community of actors hold. Yet, to invoke culture is to explain nothing. It is self-evident than any practice is the product of culture. It is necessary to be more specific. Practices arise in situations and those situations are generated by a social or organisational contexts. In any situation, actors normally respond in broadly predictable ways to cues provided by the social groups, of which they are members. In order to analyse ‘culture’, it is therefore necessary to identify those practices and explain them by reference to the wider social or organisational context. At this point, the term culture, initially too general to be of much utility, becomes focused and specific. To explain a culture, we link specific practices to a wider organisational background. This is the approach which I have taken here. I have focused on concrete practices in the Army – bullying of and discrimination against women - and tried to explain them by the wider organisational context. I have tried to explain the discrimination against women by reference to the character of the Army as an organisation.

This approach may be at odds with the way the Army understands culture. The Army understands itself as consisting of three essential elements; the

conceptual, the physical and the moral.[23] The conceptual refers to ideas about how it will operate and fight. The physical refers to its equipment and weaponry; the moral component to the relations between its personnel. The moral component refers to the morale of its people and their commitment to their role. Typically, in military discussions the term culture is aligned with the moral component. Culture refers to beliefs, behaviours and attitudes, especially at unit and sub-unit level. In the Army, the word 'culture' is often invoked to refer to a variety of disparate local practices: regimental identity, tradition, informal activities, unwritten rules, presumptions, ethos, ethics, values, and standards. Indeed, in the debates about the Atherton report, the word culture has sometimes been invoked to refer to something distinct, malign and deviant at the micro-level, in contrast with the Army as an organisation as whole.

I do not understand Army culture in this way. Because culture refers to collective practice, it necessarily incorporates the conceptual, physical and moral components. There is no point in trying to divide the Army. It is better to understand the Army as a single organisation whose conceptual, physical and 'moral' dimensions are indivisible. For instance, a tank regiment is its people, its tactics, its training, its doctrine - and its tanks. Together, these conceptual, physical and moral elements constituent that regiment. The practices of a tank regiment can be explained only by reference to all these things. They are its culture. Similarly, to understand the behaviours towards its female personnel, it is necessary to identify the routine exclusionary practices of soldiers and officers and to explain them by reference to wider organisational factors. These factors will necessarily involve military doctrine, ideas, and values, but also training, equipment and weaponry. Army culture is affirmed and reaffirmed by innumerable interactions between personnel on a daily basis, out of which a set of routine practices, acknowledged understandings, presumptions and expectations emerge. Army culture is not a thing or a structure but a set of practices which become so routinised they are never questioned. This Report is an audit of Army culture. That means that it is an organisational analysis of behaviour towards female personnel, including recommendations about how to ameliorate or eliminate exclusionary practices in the

23 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/33693/20110519ADP_Army_Doctrine_Primerpdf.pdf, 1-13.

Army. To conduct a cultural audit of the Army, it has been necessary to consider the Army as an organisation.

Chapter 3

The Female Experience

3.1. Female Integration

The Atherton Report documented the female experience in the Army. The findings were disappointing, in some cases, shocking. However, despite negative reporting, the Atherton Report also acknowledged that many female soldiers and officers found their service rewarding. After all, nine out of ten respondents to the survey reported that they would recommend a career in the Army to other women. My interviews with female service-personnel affirmed the Atherton Report's findings. There were many serious issues, which will be discussed below. However, female interviewees also stressed the value of their service. They acknowledged that the Army had made significant progress in terms of integration and that their experiences had improved: 'We are going in the right direction'.[24] Others, with over twenty years' service, noted: 'We have come a really long way'.[25] In comparison with the past when discrimination was institutionalised and bullying the norm for both male and female soldiers, the situation has improved dramatically. Others acknowledged that 'the Army tried hard'.[26]

Older male soldiers affirmed the point. An officer who had joined in the 1980s stated that: 'The young men and women now would not recognise the Army I joined'.[27] The Army had improved:

> The Army I'm in is light years from the one I joined [in the 1990s]. In the past we were scraping soldiers off the floor [i.e because they were so drunk].[28]

> People used to get laid out in the past [punched to the ground]. It's heading in the right direction…Hazing crows, getting shitfaced, punching – as a regular

24 Interview 59.

25 Interview 79.

26 Interview 34.

27 Interview 60.

28 Interview 13.

> punishment: there is none of that now. The drinking has dropped off. Hazing [Initiation rituals] has calmed down. We are breaking down negative culture.[29]

A long serving female was well aware of some of the shortfalls but explained the reasons she had stayed in the army so long:

> I have loved my service, and I still do. I would be protective of the organisation I've served for so long and continue to serve and love. I am proud of what we do. There are problems in anywhere – in all organisations in civilian society. I work with phenomenal men and women who have always treated me with respect, loyalty and commitment. We have achieved great things.

This female was by no means alone. On the contrary, after a critical discussion of her experiences in the Army, one female officer, concerned that she might have given a false impression, concluded the discussion by emphasising her positive experience of the army: 'We genuinely enjoy the work we are doing and the people we work with'.[30] In another interview a female senior NCO, with over twenty years' in the Army and wide operational experience, recalled, in between her well-evidenced criticisms, the high points of her career: 'I was a company medic with 2 PARA on Telic and Herrick. They were the good days. We were treated like one of the lads. We were looked after'. Even given all the negatives, she argued that 'the good outweighs the bad'.[31] A female in the combat arms confirmed the point: 'My experience has been quite positive'.[32] A female soldier in the infantry stated: 'I love the actual job'.[33] A female officer described her current assignment as 'the best place she had worked'. She actively wanted to stay in the unit she was enjoying it so much.[34]

Female personnel were deeply critical of various discriminatory practices but overwhelmingly they affirmed the Army's culture: 'It's easy to focus on the negatives and they are recorded well. But what aspects of our culture do we want to keep?

29 Interview 76.

30 Interview 68.

31 Interview 59.

32 Interview 61.

33 Interview 77.

34 Interview 59.

What sustains us in the delivery of hard operations…What bits of culture do we know we need, which is distinctive from the US or the French? What is the kernel of our culture which allows us to *fight and win*? And what is tacked on that we don't like?'.[35] Although this interlocutor condemned some discriminatory aspects of military culture, she had faith in the culture of the British Army more widely. After all, having graduated with a degree from a leading university in the UK and with the opportunity to choose almost any professional career, she had served successfully for 18 years. She had stayed in voluntarily because her career was rewarding, not because she needed to. The Army has by no means completely failed its female personnel. In the last thirty years since the disbandment of the WRAC, it has integrated a large number of females, many of whom have performed outstandingly, enjoyed their service, and had good careers. The Army's achievement here – as in other areas of social mobility – should be acknowledged.

3.2. Code Male

Women have served successfully. Yet, the interviews also revealed that many women have suffered unnecessary obstacles and unacceptable difficulties in their service. In his work on war and gender, Joshua Goldstein claims that historically 99.9 per cent of military forces have been male.[36] It is certainly true of the British Army. Historically, notwithstanding the important role of female nurses in the nineteenth century, the British Army has been an exclusively male institution from its inception until 1992. About 90 per cent of the force remains male to the present day: much more in the artillery, engineers and, of course, the combat arms themselves. The Army has been and remains a male organisation. Because of its mission and its robust physical requirements, it has been dominated by males.

Independently of any other factor, the Army's demography increases the chances of harassment for its female personnel. It is more likely that female personnel will be harassed and bullied simply because the force is overwhelmingly

35 Interview 4.

36 Joshua Goldstein *War and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

male. Most civilian organisations now comprise mixed workforces which typically approach 50 per cent male and 50 per cent female. Civilian organisations certainly contain males who bully and harass their female colleagues. However, there are nearly twice as many men in the Army as in a civilian organisation (almost 90 per cent as opposed to 50 per cent). Moreover, because there are only a quarter of the number of females in the Army as in a civilian organisation (12 per cent vs 50 per cent), and almost twice as many men, a woman in the Army is statistically four times more likely to be subject of abuse, than a female in the civilian workplace. There are simply more males to behave badly and their poor behaviour in the Army is focused on far fewer women. The chances of females suffering abuse are magnified considerably in the Army. Of course, there are many counter-vailing factors which generate abuse and harassment but it is useful to keep these statistics in mind.

In addition, not only does the Army remain a male-dominated force but the profiles of the males it recruits is also rather distinctive. There is an immediately striking observation; the British Army has a very unusual age profile. In stark contrast to civilian organisations, its personnel are very young, with a sharp age gradient over its cohorts. While most of its soldiers are in their twenties, there are very few military personnel aged over 50. In 2020, 35,000 or 42 per of the Army's soldiers were under twenty-five years of age; 65,000 soldiers or 79 per cent were under thirty.[37] Much of the bullying and abuse which women receive is related to sexual attraction. Because fewer are married or in stable relations, sexual activity is higher in young cohorts. As one senior noted: 'Young male and female soldiers just want to have sex with each other'.[38] Education institutions have faced precisely the same problem of ensuring decency and consent in a sexually active population, for whom they are responsible.

It is not only that the Army recruits young people. In the combat arms, the Army tends to attract confident, robust, and often aggressive males. The training actively amplifies their sense of group identity and aggression. Moreover, the Army generally recruits its soldiers from lower socio-economic groups, with poor education and, often, deprived, even troubled family backgrounds. Individuals from these groups are likely to have developed attitudes and expectations which are

37 https://www.statista.com/statistics/580534/number-of-personnel-in-uk-armed-forces-by-age/

38 Interview 76.

inconsistent with inclusivity and tolerance, or with the British Army's Values and Standards. In some cases, individuals, neglected or abused in childhood, have learnt to respond to social situations with either verbal or physical aggression. They have not been educated about non-discriminatory language or behaviour at home or school. Male soldiers are not generally deeply sensitive or self-conscious; they are typically immature. Younger soldiers have also been influenced by a culture in which pornography has become immediately accessible. Given the background of much of its personnel, a female officer rightly noted: 'The Army is not worse than civilian society'.[39] Many problems evident in the Army are also to be found in schools and university campuses.[40] However, because the Army consists of so many young people from more challenging backgrounds, it is more likely to suffer from these problems.

There are further organisational challenges for the Army. Unlike most civilian organisations, soldiers do not just work on a military camp; they live in barracks too. The Army is a residential organisation who becomes de facto responsible for its personnel 24 hours a day. The fact that soldiers live together in barracks significantly increases the chances of behavioural problems. The opportunity for bullying, harassment and assault are vastly increased over a civilian workplace. Recent scandals at other residential institutions, like boarding schools, universities, or prisons, shows that the Army is at higher risk than civilian workplaces simply because its employees live in. This does not excuse poor behaviour, but it may explain its higher incidence in the Army and the difficulty of eliminating it.

One of the central challenges for females is that the Army remains not just a male organisation but a specifically masculine one; it is coded male. Because they have almost always only ever served with male soldiers and rarely see female soldiers or officers, men in the British Army have often presumed that soldiering is an exclusively masculine activity. They have conflated their pragmatic experience of Army service with an essentialist value judgement about the Army as an organisation. The Army is coded male for the vast majority of its soldiers. They see its practices as necessarily masculine, best performed by men. In many cases, so

39 Interview 47.

40 E.g. See the *Everyone's Invited* movement.

ingrained is the presumption, that many soldiers do not even realise the gendered presumptions they make.

In some cases, these presumptions have, as we shall see, actively generated aggressive bullying and harassment. However, since it is far more common, the presumption of masculinity has generated routine, every day, unacknowledged practices, which while often quite unintentional and sometimes even benign, create an atmosphere which excludes and marginalises women. Male soldiers, with apparently entirely benign intentions, accidentally discriminate against their female colleagues. They do not even see they are doing it because their biases have not been acknowledged; they are effectively invisible.

3.2.1 Language

In the most mundane cases, these micro-practices seem trivial, almost laughable. Language is deeply pertinent here. One of the principal ways in which the Army continues to be coded male is through the unthinking usage of language, which although once appropriate for the all-male forces of the twentieth century, is now anomalous. For instance, interlocutors recorded the way in which many males in the army, including very senior generals, still failed to find a vernacular to describe their diverse soldiery. One interviewee recorded the way that 3-star generals had, with a straight face, addressed mixed audiences as ‘Chaps - and Chapesses’. The expression seemed comradely and unproblematic. Yet, the implication of the appellation ‘chapesses’ was clear. While the words ‘chaps’, as common word in the English language, invoked the cheerful sense of camaraderie which the general was seeking, the word chapesses was a clumsy neologism. It had the opposite effect. It highlighted the distinctiveness of the female personnel and asserted that the females in the audiences could be defined only in relation to their male peer. They were there on sufferance. The interlocutor noted that while the example might seem trivial, ‘people who would become sexual predators acted with impunity’ because of this kind of phraseology.[41]

41 Interview 3.

Many interlocutors made a similar point. They noted that their superiors typically used the collective terms, ‘lads, gents, blokes’, even when there were female soldiers in the unit. The phrase ‘lads and ladesses’ or ‘lads [and then remembering it was a mixed audience]… oh and ladies’ was common. Alternatively, if there were only one female present, the officer or senior would call out ‘Lads – and then me’.[42] In one combat unit, ‘men’ was the preferred term of collective address. However, since there was a female soldier in the unit, the officers and seniors using this appellation would then add: ‘The men…and Smith [anonymised name of female interviewee]’.[43]

In the course of the research for this report, the linguistic problem was evident. Although it was certainly not as contrived and perhaps not as exclusionary as the terms ‘lad’ or ‘chap’, male interlocutors especially in focus groups all but universally used the terms ‘manpower’ and ‘under-manning’ when discussing their units’ problems. These are plainly proper English words and are by no means not necessarily exclusive. However, in the difficulties of integration and in light of the usage of other constructions, they had a reinforcing effect. They, like the terms ‘lads’ or ‘blokes’, suggested that the norm for the army was male. These terms gender code the military.

In other examples the term ‘female’ was surreptitiously inserted into a phrase to distinguish a women soldier from her peers. Thus, one officer reported that she was selected first time for promotion. However, the report concluded that this was entirely deserved because ‘she was a good *woman* soldier’. The reporting officer supported the female but by inserting the female classifier, he had accidentally undermined her. The report implied she was good by the standards of females, who, of course, were inferior to males, rather than good by the objective and shared standards of professionalism. The female in question rightly observed: ‘The phrase “good woman soldier” was not an act of malice but he did not need to put it in’.[44] The reporting officer had coded the service of this female male and highlighted her as an anomaly. She was damned by faint praise.

42 Interview 64.

43 Interview 77.

44 Interview 61.

In themselves, the clumsy nomenclature employed by leaders in the army seems unimportant. Yet, because it highlights females as an exceptional class of soldiers, it facilitates and legitimates discrimination. Moreover, the benign language of 'lads and laddesses' slips quickly into outright denigrations. Many women understandably complained about this verbal abuse in interviews. Unflattering terms were in common usage: 'Wench, Doris. I've been called wench'.[45] There are a number of standard phrases in the British Army today, but interviewees highlight two. Firstly, females in the Army are commonly dismissed as 'split-arses'; the term refers to female genitalia, of course. It is not as obscene as some misogynistic terms of abuse, but it is plainly crude and offensive. Unlike apparently friendly terms like 'laddesses' or 'ladies', the term is invoked when a female or females in general are being denigrated. For instance, one female interviewee gave an example of the typical response of male colleagues if she questioned her treatment: 'Typical split-arse: complaining again'.[46] Whereas a male soldier who complained might be criticised as an individual, who was whining unjustifiably, a female who complains, is dismissed on the basis of her sex. Because females have already been classified as a different status category in the Army, they are open to this form of collective abuse. Secondly, female service-personnel can be dismissed as 'green fleet'. Green fleet refers to the Army's military vehicles as opposed to its 'white fleet' of civilian cars, minibuses, and buses. It means that the females in the Army are at the service of their male colleagues: 'You are a squaddie bird', 'You are less than them. You are green fleet. The assumption is that he is senior'.[47] It is noticeable that no male soldier would ever describe his fellow male as 'green fleet'. Green fleet implies subordination and marginalisation. More malignantly, the term has sexual connotations implying that women are available to male soldier in other ways as well. Unfortunately, officers and soldiers employ the term. Indeed, one of my interlocutors had questioned an individual, they described as a 'very high-ranking officer', for using it.[48]

45 Interview 41.

46 Interview 64.

47 Interview 32.

48 Interview 32.

In the face of some of the serious assaults which females have suffered, language seems a rather artificial place to begin an analysis of British Army culture. Yet, this everyday language used constantly creates an atmosphere and sets the unacknowledged conditions of life in the military. It is a major part of the female experience of service. The Army should pay considerable attention to these terms. It should outlaw outright terms of abuse like ‘split-arse’ or ‘green fleet’. It should eliminate the use of neologisms like ‘chapess’ or ‘ladess’. This might be dismissed as trivial. Yet, racial epithets, which were presumably once looked upon as friendly banter, would now rightly be sanctioned severely; it would be impossible to use once common terms of denigration for Afro-Caribbean or Asian soldiers. Soldiers would themselves find those racist terms shocking and unacceptable. The same standard should be applied to female terms.

3.2.2. Double Standards

The problem with this discriminatory language is that it generates a culture in the Army which normalises the marginalization of women. Because the Army is normalised as a male institution – women are always out of place and secondary within it. For instance, there is a presumption among many soldiers that females are bound to be weaker, worse soldiers. Female interlocutors repeatedly recorded this expectation. One interviewee recorded an experience when a female platoon of cadets at Sandhurst had participated in a demanding field exercise in training: ‘On one exercise – an infantry heavy one – one of the male instructors said: “We always get small females coming here and they are shit. We were surprised you weren’t”’. The instructor intended his comments to be complimentary. Yet, in faintly praising this particular platoon, he was only reinforcing a general stereotype. In the army, men are strong, women weak: ‘There is an expectation you will be crap’.[49] Indeed, some male soldiers admitted the point. A senior at an infantry regiment recorded honestly that he was sceptical about the integration of females into the ground combat roles. He was biased because of his own previous experience with a single female soldier, who he described as a ‘nightmare’. Because of this single

49 Interview 71.

experience, he presumed that all females would be similar incapable; just as he assumed that male soldiers would be at least adequate until proven otherwise. Reality proved otherwise: 'I trained the first female. It changed my opinion. She was as good as the blokes. She did well'.[50]

Closely related to this expectation that all females will necessarily be weaker and worse than all males, is the problem of double standard. Training standards are crucial for the Army; in the absence of operations, they are the only way of ensuring that the force is capable. On operations, they keep people alive. Female personnel especially in the combat arms agree with equal standards: 'I completely agree with open standards'.[51] However, standards can be difficult for women. Females often had little problem with technical standards. There are many outstanding females in military intelligence or Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, for instance. However, the Army weighs physical tests with great significance. Given the role of the field Army, this is broadly justified. However, it does create a difficulty for almost all female soldiers. They are generally smaller and weaker than most of their male colleagues; a recent NATO study found that males had, on average 40 to 60 per cent greater upper body strength than women.[52] Consequently, the standards the Army demands are more difficult for women to pass. There does not seem to be anyway around this – without a radical reduction in performance. However, because standards are harder for women, females rarely find themselves in the favoured top third of any physical test: 'To be in the top third, you need to be an elite female athlete'.[53] Females typically pass tests in the lower half or bottom third. As a result, females – especially officers - are sometimes subjected to informal criticism; they should be in the top third. In some cases, females have been subjected to secondary informal testing to which their colleagues are not subject. In one unit, a female officer had passed a rigorous selection process to join the regiment, only to be tested on an informal march when she joined her regiment, to which their male peers were not

50 Interview 75.

51 Interview 61.

52 NATO Chief Scientist Research Report *Women in the Armed Forces* (May 2021), p19. See also; Ian M Gemmell 'Injuries among female army recruits: a conflict of legislation' *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 95(1) (2002): 23-27; Elaine Donnelly 'British study finds soldiers "too weak" for land combat' *Centre for Military Readiness* January 14, 2002: e.g 70 per cent of women and 20 per cent of males failed to carry a ninety pound artillery shell over a measured distance.

53 Interview 61.

subjected. As a result, because of the pressure on them, some females have suffered anxiety at the thought of physical training and have taken sick notes – to the detriment of their careers. The Army needs to set the standards it requires. Naturally, these are going to be difficult in the combat arms. However, females who pass the standard should be accepted. As one female interviewer said: 'I've hit the standard: what more do you want?'.[54] There are many males in units who have only just passed a fitness standard; they are not in the top third. Yet, they are completely accepted as soldiers and recognised for other qualities in which they might outperform colleagues.

Women also face worse consequences if they fail a test. For instance, one female soldier recorded: 'If I fail a regimental fitness test, I get ripped. But if I pass, it is expected'. Moreover, when female soldiers fail a test, their performance is classified quite differently to when a male fails the same standard: 'If I failed and a male failed, it would "oh, the female failed, that's bad"'.[55] A female officer noted the same unfair categorization: 'If a woman is at the back of a run, that is a problem but a chap at the back is never noticed'.[56] Because the army is always already coded male, poor male performances are attributed to the individual failings of that particular soldier; not so with a woman. Her failings indicate the weakness of all women soldiers and that, as a class of people, they should not be in the Army – or in this regiment. A female failure is taken as evidence that the masculine coding of the army is correct; women are weaker and worse soldiers than men. Another example of male-coding is that females in a particular post are not defined by their performance or the performance of role by their predecessors. Rather, they are often assessed in relation to the last previous female incumbent: 'Women get compared to the previous women in the post – not the role. The benchmark is another female. It happens across the board'.[57]

In line with this, one interviewee recorded how she had been systematically undermined when she had been promoted to a position of senior non-commissioned officer in her regiment. A former peer, who held a senior rank in the regiment, had

54 Interview 61.

55 Interview 77.

56 Interview 79.

57 Interview 59.

actively sought to undermine her. For instance, the female believed that some individuals were not adhering to Covid rules. Properly, she called the unit to the parade square for a reprimand, warning that disciplinary actions would follow if there was any re-occurrence. However, rather than accepting a rebuke from their superior, her subordinates actively sought to undermine her by taking it to the company commander. Astutely, she pre-empted her male colleagues by notifying the Commanding Officer. The situation was resolved though no formal charges of insubordination were ever brought. It was a deeply unhappy experience for this individual: 'I started questioning myself'.[58] There was no question of her competence, but her male subordinates did not want to accept her authority simply because she was female. There is an assumption that the ideal standard of performance is male. A female might perform adequately, as a woman, rather than simply as another professional soldier or officer. On this comparison, it is almost impossible for a woman to be better than a man.

3.2.3. Favouritism

Females in the Army face a related problem. When they are awarded a post, a promotion or recognition for something that they have done, males often presume it is only because they are a woman. They believe that senior leaders in the Army are biased in favour of individual women because they want to demonstrate that the army is an inclusive organisation. Indeed, female service-personnel themselves observed that they could be individually advantaged in this way; they recognised a paradoxical advantage at work. Precisely because there are so few of them in any unit and because commanders want to have some diverse representation at any event, individual females are often ultimately favoured. They are recurrently chosen to represent the unit in social or other professional events, while the majority of their male peers are excluded.[59] This understandable but disproportionate representation can generate a sense of grievance among males. The problem with this kind of questioning is that it undermined their confidence. As a result, women are subject to

58 Interview 59.

59 Interview 33.

denigrating remarks: ‘Did you get that prize because you have a vagina?’.[60] They began to believe they were being unduly favoured: ‘You begin to doubt yourself: “Have I won it by merit?”.[61] The fundamental point, however, is that because there are so few females in certain parts of the army, everything they do or do not do is inscribed with a disproportionate significance. It obstructs true integration.

3.2.4. Rumours

Once women have been marginalised in this way, they have been the victim of other methods of exclusion. Because soldiers spend so much time with each other in training, exercises and on operations, and there are long periods when they are on duty but not immediately doing something – they are waiting, they talk to each other a lot. In these quiet moments on duty, soldiers often share very personal details about themselves with their comrades to an extent which would be rare in a civilian organisation: ‘Generally people are happy to open up. We spend a lot of time together. More than civvies. People can open up’.[62] The Army runs on gossip, conversation, and chatter; it is a rumour mill. Rumours and gossip serve an important organisational function. They maintain morale, engender small unit cohesion and inform soldiers. Yet, for women, rumours have a negative side. Malicious rumours about women’s failings and, above all, about their private behaviour with male soldiers are very common. For instance, on an operation, a dangerous rumour circulated about a relationship between a female officer and the padre. It was suggested that they were sleeping together. Not only was this professionally damaging to the female officer, it was personally harmful; she was married.[63] The story was entirely false, but it began to circulate because, as a result of an excellent working relationship, the two individuals developed a close friendship. While such a professional friendship would be looked upon favourably between two males, it fuelled a malicious rumour. Of course, it was the female officer who had more to lose here. While a male soldier might be forgiven – and even applauded –

60 Interview 61.

61 Interview 61.

62 Interview 41.

63 Interview 72.

for having relations with a female colleague, the woman is damned. This was demonstrated very clearly in another case, when close relations developed between a female officer and a senior. There was some substance to this case – there was an obvious attraction between the two individuals which was almost unignorable.[64] However, it was the female officer, not the male sergeant, who was the subject of opprobrium. Because the Army is coded male, any evidence, real or invented which might undermine females, can be exploited by male soldiers – and often is. When a female and a male soldier are equally guilty of the same offense, the female is the focus of castigation not only for her individual failings but because she represents a class of people already seen to be marginal to the army.

Male coding inscribes itself deeply into Army culture and, indeed, it is constantly reinforced through language and apparently trivial social practices. It is important to emphasise that this coding is not some contrived ideological construct artificially sustained by the conscious effort of deliberately exclusionary men. On the contrary, its very coherence rests on the fact that this coding is affirmed in concrete practice every single day. Simply because most soldiers are and have been male and continue to be, it becomes reasonable and indeed empirically demonstrable to most soldiers that the Army is masculine. The reality is in front of soldiers' eyes. They are surrounded by males. Physically, although there are some very fit female soldiers, the strongest soldiers are always men. The concrete facts of the Army's demography have encouraged a normative set of value judgments which are disadvantageous to women.

3.3. Predation

Offensive and discriminatory language, biased expectations, presumptions, and rumours are an important issue in themselves. They create an environment which is not always comfortable for women and, sometimes, very uncomfortable. These framings have a more nefarious function though. They facilitate active abuse and harassment of women service-personnel. In particular they make predation possible.

64 Interview 72.

Above all, it creates an environment in which malignant individuals can thrive. As one female soldier noted: 'I've not had loads of problems. 99 per cent treat you fine. A few people ruin it'.[65]

Predation takes many forms. Some forms of predation, although intrusive, are relatively benign. For instance, on joining a unit, female personnel often find they are subjected to unsolicited friendship requests on social media from males they do not know. The intention is clear and in a professional environment, discomforts many females. Yet, other common modes of predation are serious. They are in breach of proper military discipline and good order, and, in some cases, they are in breach of military or civil law; they are, in short, crimes. One of the most striking examples of predation in the British Army today is the phenomenon of the 'door-knock'. The issue of the door-knock is a very common experience for female service-personnel and was raised in almost every female focus group. The vast majority of females in this sample had experienced this form of predation.

3.3.1. Door-Knocking

Today, females typically live in the same barrack blocks as their male comrades. Women support this arrangement wholeheartedly. Female soldiers who had been accommodated away from their subunit reported that they were at a double disadvantage. They were not party to informal information and the verbal communication of orders and instructions. They could not be full members of their sub-unit. Consequently, it is undoubtedly better for females to be accommodated with their male comrades. Yet, in mixed accommodation facilitates come unfortunate practices, one of the principal ones of which is the 'door-knock'. Door-knocking typically occurs at night, often after personnel have been drinking. It is common for male soldiers to knock on a female's door soliciting her for sex. One of the vignettes on Operation Teamwork provided an example of this. A female soldier was subjected to an aggressive advance of this kind which was resolved when she called the female soldiers on guard. One of the females in a focus group reported that she had

65 Interview 77.

experienced precisely the same event in her service; a male officer whom she knew banged aggressively on her door, demanding access, and propositioning her, while she was in bed. In this event, other male officers, who were her friends, brought the culprit to order through a physical intervention. It was, of course, admirable that in this case males recognised that outrageousness of the behaviour. However, had they not been there, she worried what might have happened.[66] In general, female service-personnel are forced to keep their rooms locked at night for fear of sexual predators. Only one female interviewee in this study recorded that at the brigade to which she was currently posted, she never locked her room. Her experience was commendable, but it was the exception rather than the rule.

The fact that door-knocking seems to have been going on for a long time suggests that it has perhaps not been taken quite as seriously as it might be. In some cases, males have brought miscreant men to order. However, this is not always the case. For instance, in one unit, there had recently been a notable door-knocking incident. A soldier had knocked on a female colleague's door persistently for a two-hour period. When he had been questioned by his chain of command, he convinced them that his actions were not malicious or threatening. He claimed he was not soliciting her but was merely asking for a favour.[67] He admitted he was inebriated and, shamefacedly, that he was attracted to the female soldier, which explained his putatively naïve request that she should wake up. In good faith, the chain of command dismissed him as a 'shy, drunk soldier'. He received no formal punishment; he was not even fined.

This soldier was certainly drunk and might have been shy. However, his actions were not nearly as benign as he convinced his commanders. In a later focus group, the female soldier whom he had disturbed recounted the incident. She did not know the culprit, and, against his claim, he did proposition her; his intentions were clearly sexual. He did not just want her to wake up. He kicked and punched the door for two hours shouting, 'I'm not going to hurt you'. The female soldier filmed it. Everyone on the block knew it was going on and did nothing, partly because the female was new to the unit. The true story never came out and the male culprit was

66 Interview 41.

67 Interview 72.

able to deceive his commanders because the female victim did not make a complaint herself. She did not want to get a reputation as a complainer, preferring to fit into the unit. She wanted, not unreasonably, to forget about it, dismissing the culprit as a 'wierdo'. The chain of command heard about the incident from a third party and then conducted an investigation.[68]

Nocturnal door-knocking is a frequent, almost ubiquitous, practice in the Army. Females are continually subjected to unwanted, sometimes aggressive, solicitation in barracks. The practice unsettles female soldiers and, in many cases, actively disturbs them. They are uncomfortable at work and in barracks. They do not feel safe. The fact that door-knocking continues and that the chain of command seems incapable of preventing, or even minimising, door-knocking reinforces the sense of male impunity. Certainly, senior officers seem aware of the problem and yet little seems to have been done: 'Why should you have to have other blokes in the mess to protect you? I shouldn't be worried. A bloke does not have to put up with it'.[69] The lack of action confirms the implication that the Army is for men.

3.3.2. WhatsApp

There are other techniques of predation which female soldiers have had to suffer. Some of these are surprising and do not seem to be widely recognised in the Army. The most obvious here is the predatory use of the social messaging system WhatsApp. Communication systems in the Field Army are antiquated. The Army is incapable of providing cellular work phones for all its soldiers and officers. Consequently, the Army have resorted to using WhatsApp messaging as a way of communicating. Units and sub-units can function only by creating WhatsApp messaging groups with the personal mobile phone numbers of their personnel. The personnel within a unit are often put under considerable pressure to join these groups since it becomes very difficult to coordinate the unit without using WhatsApp. In focus groups, some females reported their unhappiness about this arrangement. In some cases, this was not out of fear of predation but rather because it meant they

68 Interview 77.

69 Interview 41.

were always contactable. They were regularly disturbed on the weekends or when they were on leave by intrusive WhatsApp messages. Their experience here was no different than their male colleagues.

Yet, WhatsApp has become a central mechanism for predators in the Army. When a female provides her personal mobile number to a WhatsApp group, she is therefore giving an important piece of private information to a large number of males, many of whom she does not know. Malicious males have exploited this information. In possession of a female's mobile phone number, they have been given a licence to send unsolicited messages to her. As a female noted: 'As a woman, I shouldn't have to be worried that other people have my number'. Sometimes these messages are just intrusive and unwanted: 'You get messages "How are you doing?" - but I've only ever spoken to this person once'.[70] However, they often take a more sinister form. For instance, in one regiment, there had been an epidemic of anonymous WhatsApp messaging. Females in this unit not only received offensive messages but also obscene photographs: so-called 'Dick pics'. Male soldiers routinely sent photographs of their penises to their female colleagues. One female recorded: 'At 17 years old, I got dick pics from people I didn't know'.[71] Obscene photographs on social media is by no means a problem which is exclusive to the Army; it is a very general problem in contemporary culture. Many schools have struggled to control the practice. As a result, the practice of sending pornographic images has recently been criminalised. Yet, it has been a major problem in some Army units and the practice continues. WhatsApp predation highlights the quite different experience of females in the Army. Male soldiers do not suffer a similar problem with male homosexual predators. It is likely that the offense might be taken more seriously if that were, in fact, the case.

3.3.3. Solicitation

There is a third method of predation which female interviewees reported; personal, face to face solicitation. This was in fact a common problem. The mess is a prime site for this kind of intrusion, but it can also occur in barracks or in the field. For

70 Interview 41.

71 Interview 41.

instance, one female interviewee recorded how she had attended a Christmas mess event. In the bar, in the presence of many other male officers (who may or may not have heard the comment), a senior captain made a 'wildly inappropriate' remark to her. She did not elaborate but the implication was that he had made an obscene proposition of some kind. Her own partner subsequently challenged this individual who apologised but the event scarred the female victim: 'I still feel uncomfortable in the mess'.[72] That sense of discomfort is by no means ubiquitous, but it was shared by other female soldiers in the Army. Another female soldier had a similar experience, for instance. As a young female troop commander, her sergeant had tried to kiss her. She had refused his advances but had been bullied afterwards. [73] In another case, a senior had slapped a female soldier's rear during a mess function.

Some of these assaults are random. Individual soldiers decide of their own volition to harass a female colleague verbally or physically. However, a pattern was observable in the course of the research. There are particular situations in which physical harassment is more likely. Mess functions or other social gatherings especially when there is alcohol involved, increase the chances of an incident, as they do in civilian society. Alcohol was regarded by some females as a precipitator, and they recorded that the environment changed for them when groups of intoxicated males began to congregate at social events. Females often found those groups intimidating and it seemed to have provided an opportunity for individual males to behave inappropriately.

Rank also played a role in structuring this kind of direct abuse. In particular, although it cannot be claimed to be a representative sample, the female groups which discussed the problem suggested that the typical predator was two or three ranks superior to the female victim and significantly older. Consequently, although it would be entirely false to impugn males of a particular rank as a whole, predators were often seniors, older captains or majors. Females reported that they did not think, this misbehaviour was taken seriously enough by the chain of command. This negligence allowed it to survive. Indeed, the female who was the recipient of the 'wildly inappropriate comment' believed that 'it's almost ok-ed by the higher ranks'.

72 Interview 32.

73 Interview 32.

Females noted: ‘Nothing comes of it if it gets reported’.[74] This may not be strictly true. The senior who slapped the female soldier was, in fact, sanctioned. However, when his commanding officer tried to court-martial him, he was informed that there was no chance of a conviction. Consequently, he was found guilty of misconduct, reduced in rank and removed from his post in the regiment.[75] It was a punishment, but female service-personnel certainly have a point when they express concern that abuse and harassment is not taken seriously enough by the Army.

3.3.4. Sexual Assault

Finally, it is regrettable to report that while the overwhelming majority of female complaints referred to mundane language use and to lower-level harassment, in addition to the problem of predation, females are at risk of sexual assault in the army. It was sobering that in one female focus group consisting of fourteen female soldiers and officers, two had been sexually assaulted. A female soldier recorded the experience: ‘I was 17 on my first exercise. I was sexually assaulted on the exercise [in 2014]. I thought the behaviour was normal, but I found another female who was crying. There were three or four females out on the area on the exercise. A staff sergeant did it. He approached me and sexually assaulted me. He was arrested on the exercise, but he denied it’.[76] Not only had young female soldiers been subjected to these assaults but, the culprit had not been punished. For instance, the staff sergeant who had assaulted multiple young female soldiers was acquitted at court-martial, though he later wrote letters to his victims admitting what he had done.

If the army is serious about improving the experience of its female personnel, it needs to increase sanctions against abusers. A zero-tolerance policy to any form of predation seems essential. Soldiers found guilty of a serious abuse, such as sexual assault, should be dismissed from the service, but lesser offenses like door-

74 Interview 32.

75 Interview 70.

76 Interview 41.

knocking need to be swiftly and publicly punished. They are undermining discipline, morale and, therefore, combat effectiveness.

3.5. Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a further obstacle for the full integration of females into the Army. Plainly, childbirth and motherhood are challenges for an organisation like the Army which is a vocation not a job. The Army must be able to deploy on short notice for long periods. The Army has made very significant progress in terms of pregnancy and motherhood. Maternity leave is now available and is at least compatible with the civilian sector, and better than some. Nevertheless, pregnancy remains a challenge to a female career in the Army.

In the research, it became apparent that one of the major reasons why females leave the Army is because of their desire to start a family. The Army recruits a significant number of females as officers and soldiers who serve until their late twenties or thirties. There is, then, a significant attrition. In many cases, females decide that an army career is simply not compatible with family life; it is too committing. It must be admitted here that many males make the same calculation. It is a fulfilling job as a young man but too demanding as a husband and a father. However, there is little doubt the pressure is higher on females who want to have a family to leave. Some of the problem here is that it is almost certain that a female soldier or officer will be married to another soldier – or at least another person in the armed forces. Since soldiers spend so much time with each other and so little with other civilian organisations, and there are so few females in the army, it is very likely that female soldiers and officers will marry a peer. Service marriages of this type have many advantages. Both partners understand the career and its demands. However, double service places very significant pressure on the marriage, if they decide to have children. It is very complicated for an Army couple to sustain two careers with children. In one focus group, a female corporal approached me after the close of the session to discuss the point in person. She had two children. Her partner was in a different regiment to her, but the Army Personnel Centre seemed to take no account of their situation. Naturally, they wanted to be located in the same base or at

least the same area. That had not been achieved. As a result, she stated that she 'may sign off'.[77] Conditions of service are difficult to negotiate for an Army couple with children.

Financially, it is also very difficult to sustain a family on a dual career in the Army. If they are very determined some officers have been able to do it. As one officer noted: 'The only reason I was able to do it was that I had a full-time live-in nanny. We wrote off one salary'.[78] Even then, raising children and maintaining two successful military careers was very demanding. However, the officer perceptively noticed that for enlisted females the situation was quite different: 'At junior level, the choice is career versus children. The finances are crippling'. She was amazed that through sheer loyalty to the organisation, some non-commissioned women still choose to pursue a career in the Army; 'They like their career enough to remain in'. Yet, the fact is that for most enlisted females, the conditions and finances are incompatible with family. It just did not make economic sense. Most military families decide that the female partner will leave, the male will stay in.

The result is that the Army has a striking demographic profile in its combat support arms, in terms of its females.[79] As one Commanding Officer noted: '50 per cent of my OF-1 to OF-3s [lieutenant to majors] are female. Sixteen Non-Commissioned Officers [NCOs] are female. I have 65 women out of 460 soldiers. It is a lot, but they are located at either end of the rank structure. There is no role modelling in the middle with Senior Non-Commissioned Officers or Warrant Officers'.[80] Because of the challenges of a non-commissioned couple pursuing dual military careers, there is a notable hole in female employment in the Army. While there are a significant number of female corporals, lieutenant and captains, there are fewer senior NCOs in combat support arms who are women. This is potentially significant for the Army because it is widely acknowledged that the Sergeants' Mess exerts a profound influence on the climate of any unit. Exclusionary attitudes may

77 Interview 63.

78 Interview 10.

79 Overall, about 9 per cent of SNCOs (OR3-8) in the Army are female, which is consistent with their overall representation. It was inferred from the interviews that the female SNCOs were clustered in combat service support and support functions like AGC.

80 Interview 35.

have survived longer than they might, precisely because there are no or very few females in the Sergeants' Mess. The resistance which the female NCO faced on being promoted to a senior position, that was discussed above, might be explicable in the light of this fact. Because women had always left before reaching senior non-commissioned positions, male sergeants were simply unused to having a female in a superior position in the Mess. Indeed, she herself argued that sergeants' messes could still operate like a 'gentlemen's club'.[81] An officer concurred. When he had commanded a battalion, he had ensured that one of his male sergeants brought his wife, also sergeant, to the unit as a welfare officer. He claimed that 'it made all the difference'.[82] Even when the culture of a Sergeants' Mess is inclusive, it is likely to have a different atmosphere to one of which females NCOs were members; as will the unit of which it is part.

Pregnancy and motherhood present genuine problems for the Army. Despite the Army's best efforts, they obstruct full integration, simply because a military career is a very demanding vocation. It is a stressful career for a family with only one of the spouses working. Families move every two years; they have to endure the long absences of serving parents. The Army is challenging for a dual career couple. Wrap-around care has been introduced to support Army couples.[83] It has been an important step forward but Army couples, especially soldiers, reported that they are still struggling to align familial pressures and their careers.

Nevertheless, while the fundamental challenges are difficult, the Army might ensure couples are more aware of the support and address some unhelpful attitudes about pregnancy which still endure. For instance, in one mixed focus group for officers, a company commander was in the same discussion as one of his female subalterns. The general tenor of the discussion, to which this major contributed, was that the Army had made progress in terms of female integration and the female experience was generally positive in the regiment. The female subaltern subsequently attended the female only focus group. She emphasised the positivity of her experiences; she thought the regiment was the best place she had served. Yet,

81 Interview 59.

82 Interview 81.

83 House of Commons Defence Committee *Protecting those who Protect Us*, 40.

in a private group with her female peers, she was also able to communicate her actual experience more fully. They were pertinent to the question of pregnancy. She recorded: 'My O/C told me that I would have to sacrifice a family if I wanted to be a company commander'.[84] She noted that it was not a decision which he had had to make, even though he was married with children. Negative attitudes to pregnancy are still quite common, not only because it is seen by males as incompatible with a military career but also because females, once again, are seen to be advantaged by legally required maternity conditions. In some extreme cases, female soldiers may have exploited this. For instance, in one focus group, male soldiers claimed that a female soldier had proclaimed to her colleagues that she intended to get pregnant, so that she could get a year's maternity leave.[85] This may or may not have been true. However, it is the case that even if maternity leave is regarded as completely legitimate by male soldiers, because there is never any increase in personnel in a unit, a pregnant female necessarily imposes costs on her colleagues who have perforce to cover for her. Female service-personnel were themselves well aware of the problem: 'But if you do it [take maternity leave] with a decreasing army which is never fully manned, it creates pressure and resentment. If you take leave, you are not there; I am covering your work'.[86] Consequently, although reactionary views doubtless persist in her quarters of the army, in an increasingly pressurised working environment, pregnancy and maternity leave represents a challenge. It increases pressure on remaining personnel, and it would be wrong to dismiss their concerns. Any policy of integration has to accommodate the question of pregnancy and maternity. In a military organisation, which has to deploy for long periods and ultimately has to fight, it is not obvious how to overcome many of the issues which pregnancy has raised in terms of the female career.

3.6. Conclusion

Females have served in the Army since 1992. They have served well and, in some cases, with distinction. The Army could not now function without its female service-

84 Interview 59.

85 Interview 29.

86 Interview 79.

personnel who are an intrinsic part of the force. Many females have enjoyed their service. Indeed, like their male peers, they are proud of it. Nevertheless, while huge progress has been made, the focus groups and interviews revealed enduring problems. Primarily because the Army is still a majority male organisation, the experience of many females has been challenging. Because the Army is coded male, every female performance is weighed with undue significance as a signifier of women generally. It is a difficult and sometimes intolerable burden for women. The result has been that females are often judged differently and, in many cases, are prejudged. Females also have to negotiate the problem of excessive and intrusive male interest. Active sexual predation is a problem. Finally, pregnancy and motherhood have impeded the careers of female soldiers and have hollowed out the numbers of females serving in senior non-commissioned ranks.

Chapter 4

Re-Coding the Army

4.1. The 30:30 Policy

The Army is currently coded masculine. This is not primarily the result of an elaborate patriarchal conspiracy. It is the mundane result of the fact that in the past soldiers were male and, even today, the vast majority of soldiers in the Army are male. The result is that male soldiers presume that soldiering is a masculine activity because overwhelming they see male soldiers, especially in the combat arms. Even if they are in no way misogynistic, male expectations and presumptions suffuse military practice. Of course, the fact that Army units are often so densely bonded through training and operational experience compounds the problem. The Army actively fosters cohesion but precisely because its teams so often consist exclusively of men, it is likely that unit cohesion will marginalise females, even if it is not an explicit intention. In some cases, quite unintentionally, male personnel exclude females. Of course, because Army culture is so male dominated, it provides an environment in which active misogynists and predators can thrive. The central question, which the Army needs to address, is how it incorporates females as equals in a culture which is so profoundly male – and yet retain its war-fighting ethos? It is not obvious.

At present, there is one major proposal. On 2 December 2021, the Government published its response to the Atherton Report. It advocated a new policy to address the problem of female integration; 30 per cent of the UK Armed Forces recruits should be female by 2030.[87] Somewhat strangely, the policy did not state that the Armed Forces had to retain a force of 30 per cent females. The figure seems to have been proposed based on some organisational studies literature. For instance, in her seminal work on females in management, Rosabeth Moss Kanter discussed the issue of tokenism at length.[88] She observed that when the workforce was less than 15 per cent female, women were able to be marginalised simply because they constituted such a small minority; they were, in effect, tokens. Moss

87 https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/representation-of-women-in-the-armed-forces/

88 Rosabeth Moss Kanter *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1977)

Kanter implied that about a third of the workforce needed to be female before organisational cultures began to change and for women to be treated as full and equal members. Other researchers have subsequently corroborated the claim, suggesting that it is possible to change the culture of an organisation, only when a minority reaches about a third of the work force. [89] Below that figure, the minority will almost inevitably face problems of tokenism and marginalisation.

The Government's proposals are directed at all three services. There is little doubt that females have suffered from tokenism in the Army in the last three decades. Because they have always been in the minority – and sometimes in a tiny minority – they have often struggled to be treated equally. Their actions are necessarily weighted with a significance which is not the case for their male colleagues. The argument that female recruitment should be increased to 30 per cent is not flawed in principle, therefore. There is some very good evidence to support it – in civilian organisations.

Yet, in practice, the proposal is almost certainly unworkable for the armed forces and especially for the Army. Even if, the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, as more technical services, increased their female recruitment substantially, the 30:30 policy presents the Army with a major problem. No professional Army has ever got close to a figure 30 per cent females.

Historical and comparative evidence illustrates the scale of the problem. Women were integrated into the British Army in 1992. There was a steady increase in the proportion of women in the Army from that time from 5.7 per cent in 1997 to 7.6 per cent of the Army in 2010. In 2018, all military roles including ground combat were opened up to women for the first time. Women now comprise 12 per cent of the Army, although they are concentrated in the support functions. Far fewer women serve in combat support roles, the artillery and engineers, and very few serve in the combat arms; the infantry battalion with the most female soldiers has only five women serving as combat soldiers. Some armoured regiments, the Household Cavalry, for instance, have more but females are in the minority in the force as a

89 Megan Stroshin and Steven Brandl 'Race, Gender, and Tokenism in Policing: An Empirical Elaboration' *Police Quarterly* (2011).

whole and remain the exception in the combat arms. For the last decade, about 10 per cent of the Army has been female. That figure has proved quite stubborn.

Although the figures might be disappointing, the fact is that they are compatible with the UK's closest allies. The trajectory of female integration in the US has paralleled the process in the UK. Females served in subordinate roles in the US Army in the First and Second World War. They were organised, as in the UK, into an independent Women's Army Corps until the 1970s when they were integrated into the US Army. Gradually in the 1980s and 1990s, the roles opened to women. The Gulf War of 1990-1 in which 35,000 women (7 per cent of the force) participated has been widely seen as a watershed in female representation in the military and, by 1996, female participation had reached 13.1 per cent[90]. Roles have continued to open until Leon Panetta announced that ground combat roles would be open to females from 2016. There are now a number of females in US ground combat units: over 50 have passed Ranger training. However, most are concentrated, as in the UK, in support, not combat, roles. There are currently 74,000 women serving as active regular United States Army: 15 per cent of the force.[91]

The Canadian Armed Forces are instructive here. They integrated fully in 1989, over thirty years ago, and, in the 1990s, the Canadian Army was dedicated to peace-keeping alone. Yet, today, only 13 per cent of the Canadian Army is female.[92] There are only a tiny number of female personnel in the combat arms. The Australian Army integrated completely in 2011 but like its Anglophone peers, the profile of female integration remained relatively low: 14.3 per cent in 2017.[93] In other European NATO partners, the representation of females is often much lower. In the Dutch Army, it is 8 per cent.[94] While the French Army is nominally integrated, in fact, women are still de facto excluded from the combat arms and severely under-represented in the combat support functions.[95] Professional western armies have

90 Rosemary Skaine *Women at War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1999), 64, 61.

91 https://www.brookings.edu/essay/women-warriors-the-ongoing-story-of-integrating-and-diversifying-the-armed-forces/

92 https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/women-in-the-forces.html

93 https://www.defence.gov.au/about/information-disclosures/annual-reports

94 https://www.nato.int/ims/2001/win/netherlands.htm

95 Katia Sorin 'Women in the French Forces: integration versus conflict', in F. Pinch, A. MacIntyre, P. Browne, and A. Okros, *Challenge and Change in the Military: gender and diversity issues* (Kingston, Ontario: National Defence Academy Press, 2006),79–80; Anthony King *The Combat Soldier* (Oxford University Press), 410-11.

found it very difficult to recruit and to retain more than about 10 per cent females. The average across NATO forces is 10.8 per cent; but it is lower in NATO armies.[96]

Conscript forces do not provide much evidence in support of the 30:30 policy either. The Israeli Defence Force is a conscript military which has always recruited a larger number of females, in comparison with its peers. In 2022, 38 per cent of the IDF is female. Nevertheless, these figures need to be treated with caution as a model for the British Army as they apply across all three services. There were 2,500 females classified as combat soldiers in 2017. In 2022, females comprise 18 per cent of the total combat force; the combat brigades themselves are about 5-10 per cent female.[97] However, although females have been allowed into the infantry since 2005, they are still not allowed into elite infantry and commando units which remain all male. Many females remain in support functions; others are instructors. Females constitute an important part of the IDF but they remain in the minority in the army and especially in combat support and combat roles.[98]

The same is true of the Norwegian armed forces. Norway changed its policy about female conscription in 2017 when it became the first NATO country in which females and males were conscripted equally. In 2020, 33 per cent of all recruits were female. The Norwegian Army Forces have an all-female Special Operations Forces unit. However, females do not tend to stay in the Armed Forces, and the Norwegian Army remains a heavily male and, indeed, a masculinised organisation. There have been significant problems with harassment and bullying.[99] The Danish Armed Forces are also a partly conscript force. 17 per cent of its conscripts are women. However, only 7.7 per cent of the entire force is female, up from 5 per cent a decade ago; there are fewer females in the Danish Army though.[100]

All the comparative evidence suggests that it will be impossible for the Army to get even close to a figure of 30 per cent female by 2030. A small increase in the number of females in the support arms might be possible but it will be very difficult to

96 https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/the_danish_defence_case_international_womens_day_2019_0.pdf

97 https://en.idi.org.il/articles/24554. Email correspondence Eitan Shamir 7 May 2022.

98 See Tair Karazi Presler and Orna Sasson-Levy 'Two Steps Forward, One Step Back' in Guy Ben-Porat et al (eds) *Routledge Handbook on Contemporary Israel* (London: Palgrave, 2022).

99 https://www.securitywomen.org/post/a-look-at-norways-approach-to-gender-neutral-conscription

100 https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/the_danish_defence_case_international_womens_day_2019_0.pdf

increase female representation in the combat arms. Since the combat arms exert such influence on the self-identity of the Army, impressing themselves on its culture, an increase in female recruitment here might have an amplifying effect in re-coding the force. Yet, these arms are precisely the ones which struggle to recruit females. All the evidence suggests this will remain so. If the Army reaches a figure of 1 per cent females in all its infantry units by 2030, it will have done as well as any ally. Consequently, it is unlikely the Army will get remotely close to the figure of 30 per cent female by 2030. The Army is being set up to fail. The Army is 12 per cent female now. It might perhaps reach 13 or 14 per cent as the Canadian and Australian Armies have; 15 per cent might be possible. There will be very few in the combat arms. The fact is that the Army is a physically demanding, austere career which is unattractive to most women. There is little that Army can do about that – especially if it is to retain its role as a robust, war-fighting force. Imposing a policy on the Army, which it cannot meet, is not helpful for it, or the integration of female personnel. Crucially, the almost inevitable failure of the 30:30 policy means that the Army will not be re-coded under this programme.

Females will remain as an important minority in the Army for the foreseeable future. This is plainly a major organisational problem for the Army. It complicates the challenge of re-coding the army. It will be difficult to re-code the Army if the proportion of female personnel remains the same, as it almost certainly will. Consequently, active measures will need to be taken to re-code the Army and to mitigate the influence of its currently masculine culture. Since this cannot realistically be the 30:30 policy, some other more effective methods will have to be identified to change Army culture and to make it more inclusive.

4.2. De-Masculinizing the Army

Re-coding the Army will not be easy. Male soldiers will have to be trained and educated to incorporate females as equals. Currently, almost everything the Army does is valued as masculine. The Army needs somehow to detach masculine attributions from its activities; a transvaluation of its norms is required so that military excellence is not so heavily gendered. It needs to try to de-emphasise gender. Indeed, it needs optimally to make its activities as gender-less as possible. It must try to de-code itself from masculine, and re-code its practices as military. Female

service-personnel identified a repertoire of practices which were constitutive to male-coding. Reform should focus on these practices.

4.2.1. Communications

Language will be central to the Army's re-coding. Chapter 3 documented the complaints of many females – and indeed some male – personnel about the mundane use of gendered language in the Army. It was, in itself, exclusive and legitimated worse behaviours. The Army needs to eliminate belittling and denigrating appellations like 'chapess' or 'ladess'. It needs to develop an inclusive language. The question is what lexicon might replace these phrases. In terms of appellations, one of the problems for the British Army is that they have not developed a collective noun for addressing a mixed gender grouping. In the US, this is not nearly such a problem. There, the term 'guys' has become established as a collective noun for a mixed group. Indeed, in the US, it would be totally acceptable to employ the word 'guys' when addressing a group of females. On campus, that is in fact a common appellation used by both male and female students. However, in British English, there does not seem to be any obvious collective appellation which might be easily used by the British army; lads, men, gents, blokes, chaps cannot be extended to females. It is more likely that the military will have to develop a new vernacular here; 'troops', 'soldiers', 'gunners', 'officers', 'team', 'crew', 'folks', 'people' etc. might be more accurate and inclusive terms than the current phraseology. Although they are not intrinsically exclusive, words like manpower or under-manning are currently being changed to force or under-staffing.

Closely related to the language which soldiers use, the Army needs to revise its means of communication. Women are routinely abused and harassed by messages on social media. WhatsApp, in particular, is a central medium of abuse, on which obscene verbal and visual messages are sent. In one way, the problem of WhatsApp predation could be solved very easily. The Army needs to equip all its personnel with work mobiles so that females do not have to give out their private phone numbers to unknown males. Or procure a direct messaging service where individual contact details are not show.

4.2.2. Zero Tolerance Policy

The Army currently has a zero-tolerance policy for drug use. Soldiers who fail a compulsory drugs test are automatically dismissed from the Army. Their good conduct and previous service are irrelevant. It does not matter if the usage involves soft drugs or occurs infrequently or recreationally on the weekend or on leave. The Army refuses to countenance drug use in any form. In the light of the Army's policy towards drugs, it was surprising to find that many females who had been subjected to predatory behaviour (like door-knocking), inappropriate messaging or even outright sexual assault reported that the culprits had not been punished or were still in the Army. Females rightly called for a zero-tolerance policy for all these offenses. At present, the Army is effectively suggesting that drug use is a greater threat to discipline and good order, than the abuse of female colleagues on base, exercises or operations. This seems to be a strange, if not contradictory standard. Certainly, it seems to affirm the belief of females that they are not regarded as fully part of the army; they are, indeed, 'second class citizens'. It would seem essential to bring in a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, discrimination and harassment of females. Not every soldier who is guilty of predatory behaviour should be thrown immediately out of the Army, but all convicted culprits should be properly punished in accordance with the seriousness of their offence. A soldier guilty of a sexual assault must be dismissed. Bullying, discrimination, harassment and sexual assault are in clear breach of good order and military discipline; they undermine unit cohesion and morale. They must be punished accordingly.

4.2.3. One Standard

Females are currently suffering from double training standards. Because male personnel presume females will be weaker, they are routinely subjected to greater monitoring and observation. The Army needs to set its standards and then enforce them rigorously but equally. It needs to show that female soldiers have passed the same standard; they are professionally qualified. Informal secondary testing in the combat support and combat arms should be eliminated. The Army needs to highlight that there are weak male soldiers too and show that these individuals are not subjected to the criticisms of females, nor are they taken to define a class of personnel.

It might be useful to normalise the performance of female combat soldiers through education and instruction. In recent conflicts, female combat soldiers have played an increasingly prominent role. They were an important part of the Iraq and Afghan campaigns. Their testimonies might help male soldiers today to understand the contribution of females – not as a distinct category, as women – but as professional. Female Kurdish fighters were central to the fight against ISIS.[101] It might be useful to communicate these experiences to male soldiers who still see the military as essentially male, and who disparage females. Of course, training will be central here (see Chapter 9). When females have been integrated most successfully, they have completed training and passed the required standards. The best way to recode the army as a professional military organisation – not a male one – will be to demonstrate concretely that females are good soldiers.

4.2.4. Inclusivity

The Army needs to foster inclusion actively. It needs to invest in integrating its teams and units. *Operation Teamwork* was a potentially useful exercise here. Until February 2022, the Army had assured inclusivity principally through the Military Annual Training Test 6: a lecture and an on-line attitude survey. The presentation which accompanied Military Annual Training Test 6 (MATT 6) was criticised as poor and incoherent.[102] It was not very clear and did not address the question of inclusion adequately. Personnel widely dismissed the questionnaire as a tick-box exercise. They had to get through it on an annual basis and most personnel tried to minimise the amount of time it took them.[103] There was little evidence it contributed to inclusivity.

In response to the Atherton Report, the CGS developed a programme called Operation Teamwork, a full day in which the Army would address the issue of inclusivity. There was some scepticism in the Army about Operation Teamwork. Indeed, in the course of this research, a number of soldiers dismissed the day as a

101 Gayle Tzemach Lemon *The Daughters of Kobani* (New York: Penguin, 2021).

102 Interview 20.

103 Interviews 23, 24.

waste of time.[104] Sometimes, the criticisms of *Operation Teamwork* were interesting. Soldiers did not see it intrinsically worthless, but the way *Teamwork* was conducted in their unit meant that it proved a disappointment. In one unit, junior soldiers were monitored by their superiors. They felt it impossible to be honest – still less to be critical about the chain of command.[105] Other units went paint-balling or even to the pub. This was unfortunate.

In fact, it was a hugely valuable experience for the units which invested in the day and conducted events as they were intended by CGS. In regiments, where seniors or officers were candid about their experiences and the programme had an appreciable effect on unit's climate.[106] Indeed, many soldiers reported that they have been moved by the stories they had heard. They understood the behaviour of some of their more difficult colleagues better. They also empathised with their seniors more. At one unit, which was conducting its own culture programme, personnel were not taking the day particularly seriously until the organiser asked them when they had last cried. One of the toughest and most respected seniors in the regiment, a model professional, made a revelation which stunned his subordinates. His honesty had a profound effect on the unit.[107] Personal revelations of this sort are risky for the individual and the unit. Yet, the success of *Operation Teamwork* at those units, which invested in it, would suggest that the Army might institutionalise 'culture days' like this much more widely. In an increasingly diverse force, it is useful, maybe even essential, to invest time and resourcing in developing greater mutual understanding among serving personnel. If the Army decides that culture days are important, they need to occur regularly. There is a fear that *Operation Teamwork* was just a one-off.

4.3. Enhancing Professionalism

Cultural reforms of the type listed above are likely to help to de-code the Army. They are specific policies aimed at improving the lives of women in the Army. They are necessary – but they may not be sufficient. The most effective way to integrate

104 Interviews 53, 57.

105 Interview 49.

106 Interview 36.

107 Interview 76.

women fully may be to enhance the professionalism of the Army more generally. Females are likely to be treated most fairly in high performing, unified teams to which they can objectively demonstrate their contribution. If this is the case, then the question of re-coding the military is not simply a narrowly defined cultural problem. It is not simply about changing attitudes and behaviours in micro-settings in Army units. It requires the reform of the Army as an organisation. In particular, it is necessary to create better, more integrated teams. The Army needs to enhance its professionalism.

How will it do this? The best method may be counter-factual. It is commonly assumed that the integration of females is at odds with the Army's war-fighting capability. Some reformers have implied that the Army might step back from its hardest role, in order to facilitate female integration. Some senior leaders within the Army see a tension between the integration of females and the war-fighting role. In fact, if the Army is to re-code itself, they are inseparable. The Army may be able to enhance its military professionalism most effectively, and therefore integrate women, not by renouncing war-fighting but, on the contrary, by embracing it as its core mission.

It was noticeable that in Basra or the Combat Outposts of Helmand, it was sometimes possible to observe this enhanced form of professionalism, imposed by the operational conditions, developing organically in platoons and companies. Significantly, females have themselves argued that they felt most valued and integrated on these operations.[108] The tougher the operation became, the more valued they were as a professional and the more integrated they were. As already noted, one female described them as 'the good days'. Other females have confirmed this experience. Chantelle Taylor, a medic attached to 16 Air Assault Brigade in Helmand 2008, emphasised how deeply integrated she was into the Parachute Regiment unit to which she was attached. In a striking episode, she helped to fire a mortar during a fire-fight: 'There was a time that this would have been unheard of – a female helping out. Blokes down here weren't bothered anymore. It didn't matter what cap badge you were so long as you could do the job'.[109]

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108 For a longer discussion of the professional integration of female soldiers, see Anthony King *The Combat Soldier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), Chapter 11; ''The Female Combat Soldier' *European Journal of International Relations*, 22(1) 2016: 122-43.

109 Chantelle Taylor *Bad Company* (London: DRA Publishing 2011) p.223.

In her critical account of her service, which itself precipitated the Atherton Report, Diane Allen herself identified enhanced military professionalism as the most likely way of overcoming discrimination: 'Military culture is bound by our fighting spirit which itself is bound by our morale and sense of belonging. The warrior ethos, the fighting spirit I believe is vital, and that we need to nurture, is based on mission first, common purpose, shared beliefs, values and practices and commitment to sacrifice and service'. Allen observed that in the British Army today, 'That warrior spirit is in danger of being extinguished'. [110] Other personnel made a similar point: 'For behaviours to be right, we've got to be at war; when we've got a common goal. We are currently at a bit of a loose end'.[111]

Many individuals currently complain about the hyper-masculinity of the Army. Using operational effectiveness as an external reference point for all its standards and practices, the Army may be in a better position to integrate its diverse personnel, demonstrating categorically the contribution of each. The problem here is that since withdrawing from Afghanistan, the standards of military professionalism in the Army have generally eroded. This corrosion has undermined the Army's performance, its confidence and its morale. It may have also meant that it is more difficult for its female personnel. Precisely because the objective reference point of operations has evaporated, it is easier for some men to value performance in gendered rather than in purely professional terms. No one is sure what the standards are anymore. On this line of argument, the question of how the Army will integrate women may be most effectively answered by addressing the professionalism of the Army more widely. The question becomes: How will the Army enhance its professionalism so that it can integrate female soldiers more effectively – and fulfil its core mission while doing so? The rest of the report addresses this question. It identifies organisational obstacles to the re-coding of the Army.

110 Diane Allen *Forewarned* (Cranthorpe, 2020), p.310-11.

111 Interview 22.

Chapter 5

What is the Army For?

The most effective organisations are the ones which understand their purpose very clearly. That mission unites all personnel and gives direction to what they do; they are integrated. If the Army is to re-code itself through enhanced professionalism, it needs to identify its purpose with utter precision. The question of the Army's role may seem rather strange. After all, everyone apparently knows what the Army is for. Its purpose is to fight the Queen's enemies. Indeed, since the withdrawal of combat forces from Afghanistan in 2013, the Army has articulated its role in some detail on four separate occasions: Army 2020, Army 2020 Refine, in the debates about the *Defence Command Paper*, and then, most recently, *Future Soldier*.[112]

Yet, despite these interventions, one of the most striking findings of this research is that personnel across the Army are currently confused about its role. Instructively, the question of the Army's mission was a major topic of conversation throughout this research. Army personnel across the ranks were uncertain about what the Army was trying to do. Almost from the very first engagement the question 'What is the Army for?' was spontaneously raised by many interlocutors. Many were angry. Interestingly, this dismay was not located at a specific rank, nor in a particular combat function. Males were equally as dismayed as females. It was almost ubiquitous across the force, up and down the rank structure, and across cap-badges. A selection of comments, from a female major in the engineers, a Parachute Regiment sergeant, a brigade commander, a major-general, an infantry colonel, an Artillery captain, a sergeant in a logistics regiment, and a corporal in an armoured regiment[113], demonstrates the disquiet.

> What the fuck do you want out of the army? Are we conventional deterrence against Russia? Are we small teams? Are we space age cyber gurus?[114]

112 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-soldier-transforming-the-british-army

113 In order to maintain anonymity the quotations are not listed in the order described in this clause.

114 Interview 50.

> Leaders in the Army have forgotten what the Army is for.[115]
>
> I don't believe any of it [*Future Soldier*].[116]
>
> We have lost our way.[117]
>
> It feels rudderless. That creates a space for things to fester. We were once great. It should not feel like that. What do people want to unite about? In a void something fills it.[118]
>
> Are we being trained for war-fighting? There is no idea of the main effort. It is difficult to explain what my job is. [119]
>
> There is a lack of vision. A lack of mission.[120]
>
> There is no focus.[121]
>
> I'm so worried I may not stay in the Army. What is it for? For fighting wars of the most horrendous kind. Its purpose is to fight war in the most feral form. But a huge body of the Army from the Commander Field Army down talk about operating subthreshold. They have bracketed everything shy of a bayonet. The grey zone is unashamedly resourced.[122]

Any one of the individuals might be dismissed. Together they constitute clear evidence of concern in the Army that the mission is not clear to personnel. Moreover, even very senior officers worried that the Army, even with *Future Soldier*, had in practice lost some direction. One senior officer noted that: 'Because we have forgotten our core purpose, there is a lack of unity of purpose'.[123] For many, the

115 Interview 69.
116 Interview 31.
117 Interview 14.
118 Interview 4.
119 Interview 39.
120 Interview 6.
121 Interview 18.
122 Interview 15.
123 Interview 46

Army needed to focus on one core mission: ‘We need to do the job only we can do: fight and win wars on land’.[124]

The level of disorientation in the Army is concerning. It is also surprising because ostensibly the Army has been clear about its mission. *Future Soldier* was clear about the Army’s role:

> Warfighting remains the cornerstone of deterrence and the bedrock of the British Army. The Army’s primary job is to fight war in person when it is at its most lethal and visceral. The ability to conduct high-end warfighting remains the core of the British Army, including remaining a leading contributor to the NATO alliance and the ability to field a warfighting Division.[125]

The Army’s prime role is to conduct high intensity land warfare against a peer enemy.

However, the apparently definitive war-fighting role may, in fact, be more ambiguous that it appears. Certainly, many personnel in the Army are confused. There seems to be several reasons for this doubt among personnel. Although the document claims that the Army will be able to strike out to a range of 499 kilometres by 2024, it is very noticeable that the *Future Soldier* is a programme of reform which is estimated to be achieved in 2030: almost a decade away. It has no clear purpose at the moment. *Future Soldier* is only aspirational. Clearly, all organisations require a strategy; they have to plan for the future and to develop a future role. Yet, the fact is that while *Future Soldier* articulates a mission for its combat troops in the future, what is their purpose now?

Indeed, even while prioritising war-fighting, *Future Soldier* commits the Army to other missions. In particular, *Future Soldier* commits the British Army, to persistent engagement overseas: ‘More of the Army will be deployed across the globe, more of the time. Greater forward deployment will improve our ability to anticipate crises and be ready to compete beneath the threshold of open conflict. It will prevent conflict by

124 Interview 8.

125 https://www.army.mod.uk/media/15057/adr010310-futuresoldierguide_30nov.pdf

reassuring allies and partners and deterring adversaries'.[126] To this end, the Army has re-organised its infantry forces. It has created 11th Security Forces Assistance Brigade consisting of five infantry battalions, the Irish Guards, 3 Scots, 1 Royal Anglians, 3 Rifles and 4 PWRR.[127] At the same time, the Army has re-rolled existing Specialist Infantry Battalions into the Army Special Operations Brigade consisting of four Ranger Battalions. At the same time, senior leaders from the Army have made a series of public pronouncements about the importance of the 'grey zone'.[128]

The central problem is that while the Army might profess the priority of war-fighting, the aspiration to do other tasks has confused troops and engendered intense scepticism among them. One officer explained the problem: 'There are elements of the Army which are well resourced and have a clear focus. There are others which have a role but not much resource. There are others with no resource and questionable utility (e.g. Security Force Assistance Brigade). It's just saving cap-badge'.[129] Crucially, although it must be the priority because it is the war-fighting formation, 'elements of the division, like the Household Cavalry Regiment are in a hard place because of Ajax. 3 Division Headquarters does Exercise Warfighter. But the division as a whole is consistently slashed and under-equipped. The ability for readiness is not there'.[130] Warfighting is a profession of faith, rather than a credible capability for many soldiers. Indeed, a Commanding Officer in one of the combat units in 3rd UK Division stated bluntly that despite being committed to the Baltics, 'my regiment is not combat ready'.[131] At present, personnel feel that the Army does not presently have a clear mission; it has several functions to which it optimistically aspires. The result is that its personnel – and even its leaders - are confused about what is important. Without a purpose, an erosion of unity, direction and, ultimately,

126 https://www.army.mod.uk/media/15057/adr010310-futuresoldierguide_30nov.pdf

127 https://www.army.mod.uk/media/15057/adr010310-futuresoldierguide_30nov.pdf

128 https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-defence-staff-at-rusi-annual-lecture; https://news.sky.com/story/into-the-grey-zone-exploring-the-murky-evolution-of-warfare-12184358https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/troops-must-adapt-to-new-types-of-warfare-general-warns-lw7qrkl5g; https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-the-general-staff-rusi-land-warfare-conference-2021

129 Interview 8.

130 Interview 8.

131 Interview 38.

ethos is evident. After Afghanistan, the Army has lost a mission, but failed to find a role.

The Army's lack of direction has been compounded by events in the last two years. In March 2020, the first wave of Covid arrived in the UK. Since that time, the Army has been heavily committed in support of UK resilience. Before Covid, the Army contributed 15,000 working days to UK resilience operations. During Covid it has delivered 880,000 days: an increase of nearly 6,000 per cent.[132] It has provided crucial support to the UK government and to the NHS, building hospitals, mass testing and vaccination. It has provided drivers during the fuel crisis in 2021 and various other resilience tasks. Especially during the Pandemic, the Army had to honour its commitment to Military Aid to Civil Authorities (MACA) tasks; the country was in a crisis. Unavoidable though they may have been, the intense round of resilience tasks over the last two years have further distracted the Army from its role. Whatever Future Soldier professes about war-fighting, soldiers have experienced turbulence. However, personnel are concerned about the alacrity with which senior leaders in the Army have committed the force to resilience tasks; they believe it has exacerbated the problem. For instance, one group of officers reported their experience from before the Covid crisis. Even then Military Aid to Civil Authorities tasks were causing tensions within the Army: 'Four years ago, the CGS [General Sir Nick Carter] spoke to us: about 40-50 captains. He was asked: "Why are we doing all these additional tasks"'. He replied: "When the cuts come around, we will have done tasks like flood defence etc. It will protect us from cuts".'[133]

This strategy of showing its civilian utility has not seemed to work for the Army. In the event, the Army suffered worse cuts in the Integrated Review, than the other services. Some resilience tasking was unavoidable during Covid, yet it seems that, being unclear about its prime role and perhaps lacking conviction in a conventional, high-intensity war-fighting land capability, the Army has allowed itself to be distracted into a series of subordinate tasks. It has ultimately allowed itself to become little more than a reserve pool of labour for the government.

132 Interview 8.

133 Interview 28

It was noticeable that in the light of this lack of direction and purpose, several interviewees advocated that the Army needed a war to reconstitute itself. Unable to commit to a single mission, they believed that the only resolution was to have one forced on the Army: 'We need a war. Things are monotonous. We need a war'.[134] Others, like the female solder cited above, looked back with fondness to Iraq and Afghanistan, precisely because the Army's purpose then was so clear: 'Afghan and Iraq were a good time'.[135]

In 2025, the Army will be the smallest it has been since the mid-eighteenth century. If the Army is to develop coherent, integrated, capable teams, in which females can take their full part, it is imperative that the Army identify a mission. This mission needs to be not just a general aspiration for war-fighting, but a specific way of operating at high-intensity and, perhaps, even a particular operation. In the light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Army's purpose seems to have become much clearer. It seems that a major war-fighting contribution to NATO is the Army's prime mission. Although the mission of the British Army seems a long way from the female experience, the lack of a clear purpose has impeded female integration. The Army's ability to create strong, integrated units is vitiated by the lack of a unifying purpose. Consequently, professional standards have eroded or become ambiguous. In this context, it is difficult for female service-personnel to show their worth, as they did in the combat outposts of Helmand. It is difficult to re-code the Army as a more professional, integrated force when its core purpose is not clear.

Of course, focusing on a war-fighting mission will not solve the Army's problems in and of itself. For instance, the Wehrmacht and the Canadian Airborne Regiment in the 1990s had very clear, but amoral, war-fighting mission – and their cultures were pernicious.[136] Yet, without a unifying purpose, it has become very difficult for the Army to establish an inclusive professional culture. It is hard to build effective integrated teams when their purpose and roles are not obvious to

134 Interview 24.

135 Interview 33.

136 Wolfram Wette *Die Wehrmacht*. (Verlag: Fisher Taschenbuch, 2005); Donna Winslow *The Canadian Airborne Regiment: a socio-cultural inquiry* (Ottawa, Canada: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Canada, 1997).

personnel. A legitimate and credible mission provides the starting point and the criteria for every other reform.

Chapter 6

Prioritization

The lack of a clear mission has disturbed personnel; it has undermined morale. Many soldiers do not understand their role. The lack of a mission has engendered other problems. Without a clear mission, the Army has often failed to prioritise. It has tried to do everything it can, rather than focus on core missions. Of course, the Army has always tried to fulfil its duties; it has always stretched itself. One of the core values of the British Army is selfless commitment: 'Selfless Commitment means putting the needs of the mission and the team before personal interests'.[137] Commitment and the determination to succeed are an intrinsic part of its culture. It is an admirable virtue. However, as the Army shrinks, its inability to prioritise tasks (because it wants to succeed) has become potentially damaging to it. In particular, the lack of prioritization evident since the withdrawal from Afghanistan means that for many personnel the Army is now too busy, often completing tasks of peripheral military utility. A lack of prioritization seems irrelevant to behaviours and to female integration. In fact, the excessive tempo of work is materially relevant to the question of female integration because over-tasking has undermined unit cohesion. Because personnel have been continually pulled for extraneous jobs, it has been very difficult to maintain unit and sub-unit cohesion. Integrating teams, and therefore female service-personnel in them, has become very difficult.

In 2010, the Army was 100,000 strong; it is currently contracting down to 73,000. However, despite a loss of approximately 30 per cent of the force in the last decade, soldiers do not notice any reduction in the workload. On the contrary, the pressure has increased. I conducted 40 focus groups across the Field Army and in training establishments. These units could not have been more different; they included logistics regiments and infantry and armoured regiments. In every single focus group, except for some of the all-female ones, soldiers and officers articulated the same concern about workloads. Strikingly, these complaints were not restricted to rank. On the contrary, officers, seniors and juniors made precisely the same

[137] Army Headquarters *The Values and Standards of the British Army*. https://www.army.mod.uk/media/5219/20180910-values_standards_2018_final.pdf, p.20.

complaint, often using the same vernacular to describe their experience of overload. The Army has too few personnel to conduct the tasks it has assumed. Units were badly overheated as a result. In many cases, there were personnel deficits in units.

6.1. Tasking

Personnel repeatedly complained that they had to 'do more with less'; 'We are at out smallest but greatest workload'.[138] For instance, seniors at one regiment argued:

> We are being pulled left/right and centre to conduct Military Annual Training Tests – but it doesn't mean you are a good soldier.
>
> The things we are ticking off to meet commitments means we are getting torn Left/Right and Chelsea – so someone at the Land Operations Centre is happy we can deploy on a MACA [Military Aid to Civilian Authorities] tasks.[139]

The Army always worked hard in the past, but personnel now talk about the 'new busy'. [140] A long-serving senior in one regiment, who had happily served throughout Iraq and Afghanistan, noted: 'This the busiest I've ever seen the Regiment'.[141] Even in 16 Air Assault Brigade, which is nominally fully staffed, personnel felt the pressure: 'We are stretched. It's a fine line. We are on the border for getting out of the door'.[142]

The problem is the same at Army Headquarters. Under the Army Operating Model, Army Headquarters head count is reducing by 20 per cent. The Headquarters is not necessarily overworked. However, one officer admitted that 'what we are terrible at, is doing less; the Army HQ is not culturally good at saying no'.[143] The

138 Interview 25.

139 Interview 39. Left, Right and Chelsea is a common phrase in the Army. Chelsea may have originated as a phonetic term for centre.

140 Interview 36

141 Interview 74.

142 Interview 57.

143 Interview 48.

officer did not think that workloads would go up in Army HQ as a result but rather that things would just be ‘done badly’.

Any one of these statements might be dismissed as a personal complaint, or as a reflection on a temporarily busy period in a particular unit. Together, their unanimity across ranks and branches suggests that there is something seriously amiss with the Army today. The force is severely overheated. Indeed, one officer claimed that excessive workload was a deliberate policy to generate the voluntary redundancies required to reduce the force: ‘There is immense pressure to make cuts in the latest round without redundancies. So, the Army is making it as miserable as possible. You can’t promote; you make things terrible’.[144] This claim may be completely false. Yet, it highlights the desperation which many personnel feel at the current pace of work.

Covid has, of course, amplified many problems. Army personnel have had to pick up many unexpected tasks at the last minute. As one officer said: ‘MACA [Military Aid to Civilian Authorities] has smashed the army’.[145] Some soldiers are bitter about this: ‘The Army is just free labour. The Army picks up state functions. We are creating work because someone wants to look good’.[146] However, Covid should not disguise a deeper problem in the Army, nor should it be an excuse for the workload many units have been given.

Interviewees suggested that the workload had increased because ‘while the Army is smaller, the commitment has remained the same’: ‘The Army thinks it can do everything and never says no’.[147] As a result, harmony guidelines are now regularly broken. In some units the situation is extreme. In one regiment, some personnel were carrying 40 days of owed leave; the average was 15.[148] Another unit noted the same problem: ‘The Harmony guidelines are out of the window, even compared with Op Herrick and Op Telic. There are people with 30 to 40 days leave owed’.[149] One Commanding Officer had written to his General Officer Commanding warning him of

144 Interview 33.

145 Interview 39.

146 Interview 25.

147 Interview 14.

148 Interview 73.

149 Interview 14.

the problems of overstretch. However, following the letter, the pace of work increased: ‘Since September 2019 and April 2022 it is as busy as I’ve had felt on the busiest period pre-Herrick. It was worth it for Herrick. This was to go on an exercise’. The Army is not afraid of hard work; ‘People don’t mind being busy, but they want to be good busy’.[150]

Personnel are dismayed not only at the intensity of work but also at the way in which that work is organised. They criticise the Army for being disorganised. For them, the Army seems to react to requirements, rather than anticipate them: ‘The Army is trying to do too much. The Army relies on the adaptability of its soldiers to buy out the lack of planning. Someone decides things without real thought, without planning and without reference to our planning and leave’.[151] They note that Army Headquarters fails to prioritise. Everything is urgent. However, personnel are well aware of the paradox the Army has created for itself: ‘Because everything is a priority, nothing is a priority’.[152]

As a result, units in the Field Army are subjected to regular ‘fastball’ orders.[153] The ‘fastball’ tasking was a major complaint among personnel. At one unit, the adjutant was hated because he distributed this unplanned tasking downwards to the troops. An officer in the unit observed: ‘It is amazing how quickly tasking comes from ministerial level down to our level and the pain is our level’.[154] Other units have their own terminology for this process; they call it the ‘trawl’. A trawl is a request, usually from the Land Operations Centre, for personnel to fulfil unexpected tasks. Trawls are a major cause of grievance. In the last 24 months, one of the units visited during this research has suffered very badly because of ‘trawls’. Headquarters had requested and indeed ordered the provision of personnel for a diversity of tasks which include Military Aid to Civil Authorities roles, supporting exercises, providing officers to staff headquarters and soldiers to check equipment. In every focus group at this unit and

150 Interview 74.

151 Interview 28.

152 Interview 28.

153 Fastball is Army vernacular for rapid, unforeseen tasking.

154 Interview 14.

a discussion with the Commanding Officer, personnel raised the ‘trawl’. Complaints were vociferous:

> Someone requests something. There is no filter. There is a disconnect between what it is reasonable to provide.
>
> It is relentless. I have been in 13 years – and never been this busy. I got trawled for a task. I was given four days notice. On Tuesday for Sunday for 6 weeks. [155]

The trawls created problems especially since they often target leadership figures: ‘The Army has become first port of call for the Prime Minister: “Get me a brigade commander or an Army staff officer”. We’ve made a rod for our own backs in terms of UK operations. It’s a constant drain. You take a Commanding Officer and you have a unit which is leaderless’.[156] In another Army unit, for instance, the separate companies had deployed on such different operations and exercises, that any sense of unity had been lost: ‘The company is so fragmented. Everyone is burned out. Now even the privates and clerks are smashed. It’s relentless’.[157] The ‘trawl’ had become a material threat to unit and even sub-unit cohesion: ‘The blokes [sic] are split to the four winds’.[158] Unit cohesion, professionalism, teamwork are all being sacrificed to immediate tasking.

6.2. Stacked Readiness

The Army’s inability to prioritise and the overwork which it induces is demonstrated perhaps most categorically in the paradoxical concept of the ‘stacked readiness’. It is currently very common for units in the Field Army to be held at double or even triple readiness. Readiness means that units have been committed to a high level of preparedness for a specific task. It is an important mechanism for generating responsiveness. However, double or triple readiness occurs when a unit is ordered

155 Interview 74.

156 Interview 8.

157 Interview 74.

158 Interview 74.

to be ready for not one contingency but two or three. Stacked readiness puts significant stress on the unit because it must attempt to prepare for more than one contingency. This is very difficult. Since there is more than one event to which it might have to respond, the chances of being called on are increased. However, stacked readiness also highlights an important point about Army leadership. Stacked readiness is anomalous. It is not possible to be on readiness for more than one contingency at a time. The anomaly was not lost on personnel: 'I'm on three standbys: Covid, flood defence and Eastern Europe. How can I be on standby for three things?'.[159] Units are put on double readiness only because Army leadership cannot make a decision about which contingency is more important. Consequently, hedging their bets, units are ordered to prepare for two or three. For instance, one unit had been assigned to a peace-keeping tour to Africa. However, in the light of the Ukraine invasion, it has been put on readiness for Estonia at the same time. This unit was, therefore, nominally at readiness for two entirely different missions in two completely different theatres: a multinational engagement mission, and a NATO mission in Estonia. Members of the unit recognised the contradiction in the tasking: 'If Putin invades, would you pull out of the [engagement] tour? I said to the Brigade Headquarters I cannot deliver that readiness. I can't do it. I can't do the vehicles. My training standards are not up to it'.[160]

Army indecision generates stress lower down; the risks are simply displaced to the units. Ultimately, stacked readiness is a form of bad faith. At some point, the Army will have to decide to which mission a unit will be committed. By failing to determine what specific readiness it wants a unit to be on and which mission is actually priority, the Army is leaving the decision to events. The unit will deploy to whichever contingency occurs first for which it is on standby. Stacked readiness, therefore, is emblematic of the Army's inability to prioritize.

The lack of prioritization, which has been such a feature of the post-Afghan Army, seems to be partly a result of a confidence crisis in the Army. It needs continually to show its utility. Without a clear mission, the Army seems to have lost confidence it what it is or should do: 'We've lost confidence in ourselves as an Army.

159 Interview 76

160 Interview 73.

We were the lead singer during Operation Herrick and Operation Telic, we are now backing singers or the bass player at best. It's uncomfortable having stepped away from the mic'.[161] Having struggled to define a mission, the Army tries to do everything from MACA tasks to Enhanced Forward Presence. One officer satirised that the Army might be characterised by a hashtag: '#DoSomethingAnything'. It tries to fulfil all the roles which it attempted when it was 120,000 even 150,000 troops strong. Unable to prioritize, it has taken on an excessive task load in the last few years. As a result, units in the Field Army today are under intense pressure.

6.3. Army Ethos

The Army has been able to sustain this pressure up to now, only because of its own robust, if not remarkable, ethos. It was repeatedly emphasised in interviews and in focus groups, that one of the problems with the Army was that it felt duty-bound to accept tasks and to accomplish them: 'The Army can never say no'. Because personnel take pride in their profession and because they are hard-working, the Army puts itself into a predicament: 'The Army is a victim of its own success'. 'The Army thinks it can do everything and never says no'.[162]

This pressure to succeed is particularly pronounced at unit level. There, pride in the unit's reputation compels personnel to fulfil even unviable levels of tasking: 'No one wants to fail'.[163] Battalion pride was palpable: 'We won't fail. We will never say no'.[164] It is one of the strengths of the British Army that its personnel are so committed and dedicated. On operations, this quality has proved recurrently indispensable. Deployed units work very hard; often much harder than their NATO peers. Consequently, they have consistently produced good results, far in excess of what their resourcing might suggest. It is one of the most important qualities of the British Army and one of the foundational elements of its culture. Yet, this ethos of duty has now become a potential vulnerability for the Army. Because senior

161 Email communication, 22 April 2022.

162 Interview 14.

163 Interview 14.

164 Interview 74

leadership have come to expect units to deliver, they have accidentally over-burdened the army with commitments. Not only were soldiers distraught about the pressure the workload had put upon them, but many also believed that, eventually, the Army must fail: 'If we repeat this cycle, in five to six years, we are in a trap: we will fail'.[165] It would fail because its personnel were broken. This is a serious risk. Ironically, its own culture of 'Selfless Commitment' may now be harming its professionalism. The Army may be cannibalising itself.

The overheating of the Army and the constant, rapid tasking is relevant to the question of female integration. Because the Army as a whole is too busy and because units are struggling to deliver their tasking, the Army has been unable to invest systematically and properly in the issue of integration and cohesion. Everyone is too busy to focus on the question of relations between soldiers in sections, platoons and troops. It is almost impossible to sustain unit integrity. Personnel were well aware of the problem. They explicitly tied the pace of work to a failure to integrate personnel and to build teams" 'If we have no trawls, if we had a year to do cultural issues, to open up, to be free to fail but *we never get that year*'.[166] Some units reported that whenever they built recuperation periods into their schedule in order to foster team-work, they were preyed upon by superior headquarters. The Army call unscheduled periods 'White Space', referring to the blank days on the unit's events calendar. Yet, units have routinely discovered that it is impossible to maintain their 'White Space': 'We've created white space for cultural change [a programme to improve inclusiveness in the Regiment in the light of the Atherton Report] but we will get trawled by Army Headquarters'.[167]

Because units have operated effectively in the past, unit cohesion has been presumed by the Army. Units are simply expected to integrate their people. Even though, the demography of Army units has changed to include 10 per cent ethnic minority soldiers, and 12 per cent females, it is assumed that cohesion and teamwork will emerge automatically. Those presumptions are now uncertain - as the female experience shows. Moreover, because everyone is so busy, no one has had

165 Interview 76.

166 Interview 74.

167 Interview 74.

any time to invest in building teams in the sub-units and ensuring professional teamwork and cohesion. Inclusiveness has been presumed – not planned for and nurtured. The Army's persistent inability to prioritise means that it has consistently neglected its central asset: its people. It has been too busy to care about its most important resource. The female experience is evidence of that neglect and of the failure of the Army leadership to prioritise. One officer made a succinct assessment of the Army today: 'We are too busy to be good'.

Chapter 7

The Promotion System[168]

Personnel are under intense pressure because the Army has failed to prioritise. The lack of a mission has certainly been a major factor for the Army here. Because the primary purpose of the Army is not clear, leadership have ordered their personnel to perform an array of roles. However, there are other factors which have played into the Army's tendency to over-task itself. Above all, the Army's reporting, appointment and promotion system explains to a great degree why the Army has struggled to prioritise.

It is easy to criticise any promotion system. They are always the focus of intense unhappiness in any organisations, as the majority of employees almost inevitably feel disfavoured by them. Few people believe they have been rewarded or recognised sufficiently by their employer. Personal resentment, whose origins might be diverse, therefore attach themselves to the promotion system. Certainly, there are many aggrieved officers and NCOs in the Army who feel they should have been promoted. It is very easy to criticise generals for their individual failings and, on that basis, to cast doubt on the whole promotion, appointments and report system. There is a vivid literature about this, initiated by Norman Dixon.[169] Easy to condemn, promotion systems are also very difficult to reform because the individuals who eventually inhabit the positions of power from which reform might be possible, are, of course, vindicated by the system. If the system has promoted them, how can it be flawed?

However, the Army recently admitted that its promotion system may not be as robust as it might be. It has recently removed three brigade commanders despite the fact that they were selected for command; it has terminated the career of a general early. There is little doubt that, like all organisations, the Army does sometimes promote the wrong people. Indeed, interviewees, who were the peers or

168 The title of this chapter conflates the reporting, promotion and appointment systems. They are administratively separate processes but since promotion is the central purpose of all three systems, I call the entire process the promotion system, though in the chapter itself it should be apparent which aspect of it I am talking to. The central focus is the two-year appointment system and its associated reporting processes.

169 Norman Dixon *The Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London: Pimlico 1994).

subordinates of some of the removed individuals, fully recognised the problem. They have been all too aware of the failings of promoted individuals: 'How do you set the cultural standards for whom to promote? The Army promote a flagrant liar. It talks about integrity, but it's just promoted that liar'.[170] Other interlocutors discussed commanders for whom they had worked. It was widely known by their subordinates that their mistakes were covered up and that they humiliated their staff. Yet, because they were seen to get things done by the chain of command, they were promoted.[171]

Some individuals in the Army are still promoted unjustly. In some cases, the wrong people become generals. The effect on the Army and their subordinates should not be understated. Because the commander has a decisive influence over the climate in any unit, the promotion of such an individual has influenced behaviours and cultures in those units. These commanders have either ignored or potentially fostered precisely the bullying and discrimination from which females and other personnel have suffered.

However, it would be quite wrong to suggest that the Army is promoting all the wrong individuals and that if only different individuals were promoted, all the Army's problems would be solved. This personalises the Army's predicament at the moment. It explains all its problems – including bullying and harassment - by reference to a small number of malign or incompetent individuals. This is incorrect. Although the actions of poor leaders might be deplored and their local effects can be profound, the problems of the Army cannot be reduced to a few poor commanders who have been wrongly promoted. After all, while many would accept that some senior leaders in the Army might not be ideal, the fact is that the current cohort of senior officers are as capable as the Army has had for a long time, and perhaps, since the Second World War. The officers in the Army today are much more educationally qualified, than their peers in the Cold War. They are more operationally experienced than many of their Cold War predecessors, having served in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond. Although it is by no means a guarantee of rectitude – and it has brought a particular kind of perspective to the Army - many senior commanders have passed Special Forces selection. There are, of course, many talented officers

170 Interview 4.

171 Interview 42; Interview 6.

in the Army who do not get the promotions they deserve. However, most of those promoted are certainly adequate (even if some unpromoted individuals might have been better), and some senior Army officers are plainly outstanding. There are a significant proportion of senior leaders in the Army who are very highly regarded by their peers, their subordinates and international allies. Certainly, it is difficult to identify other individuals in the Army who are plainly superior and would have done an obviously better job.

Consequently, although it might be satisfying to castigate individuals and place the blame for the Army's current difficulties on the promotion system which advanced them, an *ad hominem* criticism of the promotion system of this type is not that useful. After all, while the reporting and promotion system is certainly not perfect, it is not completely flawed. Nevertheless, although criticism of individuals who have been promoted has to be avoided, the appointment, reporting and promotion system is an absolutely central feature of the Army. The Army is structured around promotions. It is central to its operations and dominates the outlook and behaviours of its personnel. It is a central element of the Army's lifeworld, as important as the Regimental tradition. It is fundamental part of Army culture. The promotion system must, therefore, be analysed as part of a cultural audit of the Army. It has contributed to the difficulties described in the previous section. Substantially because of the promotion system, the Army has been incapable of prioritizing. The promotion system itself, independently of any individual deviance, generates practices which are ultimately damaging to the Army – and to its female personnel.

Although the promotion system is periodically adjusted, the Army's promotion system is of long-standing. Indeed, elements of the current system are recognisable in the Victorian Army. It is also very similar to the procedures used by its NATO allies. However, promotion in the army is peculiar by civilian standards. In civilian organisations, personnel normally specialise in a particular function, work in that function for a significant length of time to gain the skills in order complete a specific project or suite of projects. Gradually, they move up through the organisation, normally in the same area of specialism. There is no specific set time that an individual might occupy a particular office; it depends on their competence and the

programme of work they are doing. The Army, by contrast, has a robust, even rigid, system of appointment and promotion for officers. An officer career is organised into two-year blocks at each rank, typically alternating between staff and administrative roles and command. Every year an officer is subjected to a report: the Officers' Joint Appraisal Report (OJAR). It is generated by their first Reporting Officer and signed off by a second Reporting Officer. The next appointment and future career trajectory are determined by the quality of their reports, and the rating they receive from their first and their second Reporting Officer. The system alters a little at the highest echelons of command, at major-general (OF-7) level, but this is the system which determines as officer's career in the Army. The professionalism of the procedure must be emphasised. Reporting Officers take great care over OJARs since they know how important they are. Officers are allowed to see their reports. The Army has made every effort to improve the system and to make it fairer. For instance, one recent innovation has been to remove any reference to the gender of the reported officer to the Army Personnel Centre to avoid any accidental biases. 180 degree reporting has just been introduced. It is not obvious how to make such a system in itself much fairer or more transparent.

The reporting system is not intrinsically flawed or corrupt. Nevertheless, it is plainly peculiar especially when compared with a civilian organisation. The two-year cycle of appointments is particularly unusual in this regard. Two years in a post is not long enough to become an expert at anything. Since everybody in the Army is cycling through this system, it generates continual and sometimes rapid staff turnover in every single unit and headquarters. That cannot be optimal. Why has the Army developed such a system? The answer seems to lie in what the promotion system produces. The Army ultimately requires generals to command its forces. Consequently, it needs to give its future generals experience at every level of command, from platoon/troop (lieutenant, OF-1), company/squadron (major, OF-3), unit (lieutenant-colonel, OF-4) to brigade (brigadier, OF-6), and division (major-general, OF-7) five commands are required to become a senior general officer. In between those periods of command, a future general must have extensive experience of staff procedure. In contrast to sedentary, civilian careers, generals need to be relatively young; divisional commanders are optimally in their mid-forties, corps commanders about fifty and full, four-star commanders about mid-fifties. In the

light of the requirement to give a future general adequate experience across command and staff positions and, yet, be young enough to serve as a general, the two year posting and promotion cycle has developed. Two years is not objectively the best time for a commander to be in post, but it means that the trajectory of a career allows an officer to be potentially promoted to general at the right age.

There are good organisational reasons, then, why an officer's career in the Army is organised on a two-year cycle. However, while the two-year posting is organisationally rational, the promotion system has an inherent pathology which is immediately relevant to the experience of females, and to the wider predicament in which the Army has found itself. The promotion cycle certainly encourages officers to work very hard in their postings, since they know their careers depend upon it and that they are monitored very closely. However, there are some evident problems with this system. Firstly, it encourages short-termism in the Army. Because officers are in post only a short time, it is impossible for them to develop longer-term policy. However, hard they work, they can only ever focus on the twenty-four months of their incumbency. Rather than developing a project or a programme of work through to completion slowly, they understandably want to try to show at least some results under their supervision, especially since in many cases, officers and soldiers are graded too early in the annual cycle. It is difficult to see themselves as guardians of a unit or a capability.

The problem of short-termism is pronounced at senior levels in the Army, at Army headquarters for instance. Once officers reach one-star rank in the Army, they are sometimes less concerned about promotion itself; their tours are normally for three years. They recognise the trajectory of their career. An individual who had managed the careers of senior officers stated: 'It is a myth that senior officers thrash themselves to get promoted. Once you have reached 1* star, you know your future'.[172] However, even though senior officers might not actively be pursuing personal careerist interests, it is very difficult for them to take a longer perspective within the time they have in post. The structure of army career institutionalises short-termism. For senior officers, this is compounded by the fact that, dedicated to the Army, they actively want to advance the institution. They work themselves furiously

172 Interview 48.

hard, committing to a punishing routine of meetings and engagements. In many cases, senior officers manage portfolios which are far too large. The consequence is that they cannot give the attention to anything specific, nor engage with important projects for sufficient time. One officer, in this study, reported a conversation with a senior leader at Army Headquarters about workload, who said: 'I have resolved not to work on the weekend and it's hurting me'.[173] In post only for a short time and with an excessive workload, senior officers at Army Headquarters struggle to manage programmes coherently: 'Senior management never have a condor moment. You can't be sprinting to meetings all the time. There is no time to reflect; no time to step back'.[174] Work is not as organised as it might be. There is an inability to prioritise: 'There is a desire to be seen to do something. It is activity rather than output'.[175]

Myopic hyperactivity is a problem in the Army. However, the promotion system creates a more serious problem for the Army, even a pathology. This is especially pronounced in the Field Army between the ranks of captain and brigadier. The peak of competitiveness is probably at company and unit command level. Since officers have a short window to get a good OJAR, which their subsequent career will depend, they actively pursue actions in post which are more likely to earn the approbation of their superiors. Commanders are therefore typically not satisfied with just sustaining their unit and handing it onto their successor. There is every incentive to impose reforms on it and to work it excessively hard. At unit level the experience can be one of turbulence, as commanders prefer their careers over the well-being of their units and their personnel. The OJAR system is widely recognised as instrumental to the problem of prioritization. Precisely because commanders at each level in the Field Army want to promote and have only a short time to demonstrate their worth, they are incentivised to accept tasking from a superior: 'The officers can't say no'.[176] Fastball tasking and trawls, which have caused so much unhappiness in the ranks and have damaged unit cohesion, are seen as the result of officer careerism. Officers concerned with their OJARs cannot refuse tasking without implications for their careers. At one unit, where the programme was already

173 Interview 7.

174 Interview 68.

175 Interview 68.

176 Interview 76.

overheated, the incoming Commanding Officer was wrestling with the decision of whether to commit to an important but potentially refusable exercise which was not really sustainable for the unit. The decision was difficult, but it was obvious that to refuse to do this exercise would have implications for that officer's OJAR. In some cases, officers refuse to do challenging training or manipulate the training they do to make themselves look good to their report writers: 'People don't do TESEX [Tactical Engagement System Exercise[177]] because they might fail'. Alternatively, commanders prioritise non-training events which might give them visibility: 'If we do a TESEX involving loads of scenarios, we won't be able to plan for a visit [of a superior officer]. It comes down to the way we do reporting'.[178] The career visit of unit commanders by the Commander Field Army is probably a poor way to assess commanders, not least because it incentivises the wrong practices.

Up to the Atherton Report, there was very little formal incentive for commanders to ensure their units were inclusive. Many, of course, did so out of a sense of personal moral duty but the Army career weighs other apparently more important motivations more highly. Since leaving Afghanistan, the Army has been frantically busy partly because of its own promotion system. The OJAR system incentivizes constant revolution at every level in the Army, as commanders and staff officers want to demonstrate their special leadership qualities.[179]

The promotion system has a second, perhaps even more dangerous pathology. It obstructs the communication of truth to senior leaders. Under the OJAR, there is little incentive for personnel to tell their commanders the truth, if that reality contradicts the superior's own views or interests, or if it reflects badly on their units or branches. Soldiers were forthright about this problem which they had observed very widely: 'Army generals don't know what is going on. There is zero truth to power because everyone wants to promote'.[180] A group of officers made precisely the same point: 'No one wants to fail so generals don't get told the truth'.[181] For all the apparent thoroughness of the promotion system, it actively encourages an

177 A validation exercise employing laser weapons and sensors to simulate casualties.

178 Interview 47.

179 Interview 42.

180 Interview 33.

181 Interview 14.

authoritarian culture in which leaders may hear only what subordinates want them to hear.

The problem is pronounced in the Field Army, but it is also apparent in Army Headquarters. In the Army Headquarters, majors initiate many of the projects with memos and policy papers which are then passed up through the chain of command to 2* and 3* generals. However, these staff officers have noted how policy papers mutate, as they ascend through the bureaucracy: 'There is a willingness to be dishonest. There is an unwillingness to rock the boat'.[182] The result is dangerous; risks identified low down are systematically filtered out by the process because officers up the chain of command do not want to tell their own bosses bad news. They want to protect themselves and their careers:

> The risks are passed up on paper. But by 3* star level, the risks have gone. They are in the discussions between SO1 and SO2 but the risks are not acknowledged. But 2/3*s are not aware. It's not the 2/3*s' fault. The Risks are taken out or dulled down.
>
> Papers are passed up. Projects are passed up but by the time the paper is into the executive area, those risks have been filtered out. The risks are coming from the experts. We keep an eye on the papers and that the risks are managed and the cumulative effect of the risks. If you don't put the risks in, there is a potential for ill-informed decisions.[183]

As a result, one officer concluded that in Army Headquarters: 'The most powerful form of C2 [command and control] is the OJAR – the commander's MS [Military Secretary, i.e. the reporting process]. It's very important'.[184] It is perhaps because of the promotion system with its posting cycle and reporting process that the Ajax programme failed.

Unfortunately, the promotion system can also mean that the Army is less honest to other agencies and even to NATO allies than it might be. Senior officers

182 Interview 68.

183 Interview 68.

184 Interview 68.

are sometimes too sensitive to political opinion. For instance, one senior officer recorded some work he had done for the Ministry of Defence on the Army's actual capabilities. He was informed that the proposal 'did not land well'; it was not politically expedient. It was, therefore, rejected, even though it reflected the reality in the Field Army. The officer noted a dangerous gap had developed between 'external reality and internal reality'.[185] Another officer affirmed the point: 'Army cultures prevent the honest conversation and so we lie to ourselves'.[186] Since it would impact on an officers' career to admit to a civil servant or a politician, that the Army might struggle to fulfil a commitment, there is a tendency to conceal the truth: 'Senior people don't speak truth to power'.[187]

The Army's promotion system is broadly coherent and as individually fair as it can be. However, the structure of this system creates serious problems for the Army. It often encourages commanders to short-termism, in the pursuit of a good report. Rather than fostering unit cohesion and teamwork, it can undermine it. Even more dangerously, it actively encourages officers in the Field Army and Army Headquarters to be dishonest about reality, to conceal important facts about their unit, programmes or personnel. The OJAR system has compounded the overheating of the army. It has encouraged a sometimes unfocused hyperactivity, not because that is ultimately best for the Army, a unit or the personnel in it, but because it might look good to a superior reporting officer. Until the very recent past, the promotion system has not encouraged commanders to pay attention to the question of female integration or to cover problems up rather than address them at unit level. Even now, because the promotion system rewards over-tasking it means that the Army has paid insufficient attention to the atmosphere in its units and to potentially damaging discriminatory practices. Ironically, the promotion system, so central to the military profession, may actually be undermining military professionalism – and therefore the integration of females.

185 Interview 11.

186 Interview 80.

187 Interview 8

Chapter 8

Resourcing

There is a widespread concern in the Army that in addition to an unsustainable cycle of tasking, the Army is poorly resourced. Its vehicle fleet is old and decrepit; its equipment is often over-used and broken. The problems are long standing. Indeed, they might be traced back to the end of the Cold War. The central problem with the Army is that it had been under-resourced for thirty years: 'It has been on a strategic holiday since the end of the Cold War'. Of course, although the Army gained huge levels of combat experience during Iraq and Afghanistan, those campaigns compounded the problem. Heavy conventional vehicles, Challenger and Warrior, were essential to Operation Telic. However, under Operation Entirety, the Army invested in a fleet of lighter specialist vehicles suitable for Helmand but not much else. The result is that the Army's fleet is old and over-used. Of course, the Army has not helped itself here. The Army built its new armoured capability around Boxer and Ajax fighting vehicles, both of which have been delayed. As a result of structural under-funding, much of the Army is struggling with an obsolete fleet.

The question of resourcing seems to be a very long way from the question of female integration. It is not immediately obvious why the state of the Army's vehicles would have any impact on the experience of women service-personnel. Old vehicles do not in themselves cause males to abuse females. In fact, poor resourcing contributes to bullying and harassment, albeit in an oblique way. Because the Army's equipment and fleet is so old, it requires intense effort to keep it working. Units are very stretched sustaining their equipment. Rather than focusing on training and developing their professionalism, units spend inordinate time fixing their vehicles and equipment. Unit cohesion materially suffers because of poor resourcing, therefore. As a result, units have been less able to focus on the question of integration and team-building. They have been less able to foster inclusion. Resourcing is, un-expectedly, a feminist issue.

As a result of the poverty of its fleet, units have struggled to train properly. In some cases, junior soldiers are grossly under-employed because there is simply no equipment with which to train. They waste their working days simply waiting for something to do.[188] In the course of this research, it was shocking to talk to young soldiers who were bored and disillusioned, doing nothing all day. It was a grotesque waste of labour and talent. This is bad for them, their units and for cohesion.

While the lack of equipment has created functional unemployment and indolence for some junior soldiers, for others, it has intensified the already excessive pressures of over-work. Because vehicles and equipment are so old, they require constant maintenance. They absorb hours of work to sustain them. It is difficult to become a highly capable integrated combat team when equipment requires so much work and when it breaks down so easily. It is not simply that the poverty of the Army's equipment undermines professional competence and unit cohesion. It corrodes any sense of pride in the profession of arms. The problem is profound. 16 Air Assault Brigade is the best resourced in the British Army. Yet, soldiers there observed: 'I feel embarrassed by the state of the British military. We are the third biggest defence spender with £77 billion. It is embarrassing on a national level when we have to work with other nations especially the US. Even when we are doing menial tasks. For instance, we had to borrow two C-130s from the US and use their parachutes. I feel embarrassed. We look like a joke. I don't understand where all the money is going and 16 Brigade gets a lot of money'.[189]

The feeling was corroborated in many Army units. Indeed, in the heavy elements of the force, the Royal Armoured Corps, the armoured infantry and the Royal Artillery, the inadequacy of the fleet and the equipment is even more pronounced. It affects daily life in those regiments very severely. The problems are especially pronounced in the Armoured Corps which provides a very good case-study of the problems of resourcing in the British Army. The armoured fleet is very old. For instance, the British Army is still using Bulldog, a vehicle brought into service in 1962. One unit was using a vehicle that was more than 50 years old. As one soldier commented: 'Bulldog should be in a museum'. They were also using land

188 Interview 27.

189 Interview 50.

rovers which were over thirty years old.[190] There is a notorious case of this in one of the armoured regiments. In 2006, this regiment was engaged in Al Amarah in Iraq. One of its tanks was struck by an RPG which penetrated the hull and wounded one of the crew badly; it blew the individual's foot off. In late 2021, that wounded veteran returned to the regiment for a visit. Out of interest, the Commanding Officer looked up *Jane's* to find out where that tank might now be. He was dismayed to discover it was still in the regiment, in the same troop, in the same squadron; the regiment was still using it and might even go to war in it. The damage had been repaired and the tank re-turned to service.[191] It is possible that after its repair, the tank was fully serviceable again, though the armoured regiment which relied on it did not think so.

It is not just that the Army's fleet is old and often worn out. In my visit to an armoured regiment, I conducted focus groups with officers, seniors, juniors and with troopers. In every single group, the interviewees identified poor resourcing and Whole Fleet Management as the principal threat to the integrity and performance of their unit. They explained that the Royal Armoured Corps suffers badly from the effects of Whole Fleet Management, which was introduced by the Ministry of Defence to save money. Rather than every armoured regiment having its own exclusive tanks and vehicles, they Whole Fleet Manage a smaller fleet, which is held centrally and shared. Whole Fleet Management may nominally save some money on the top-line budget, but its effects are profound. As a result of Whole Fleet Management, the Royal Armoured Corps may consist of three tank regiments, but it actually operates with about 50 working tanks. The actual capability of the Royal Armoured Corps is equivalent to about three squadrons, or three-quarters of an armoured regiment.

Whole Fleet Management has significantly reduced the actual capability of the Royal Armoured Corps. This system also generates gross inefficiencies. Under Whole Fleet Management, the three regiments of the Royal Armoured Corps share tanks which they circulate. This means that tanks are overused. They are also not properly maintained as crews do not know their own tanks and are, therefore, insensitive to their specific problems. They cannot anticipate and pre-empt mechanical problems which they might be able to do on their own tanks. There is

190 Interview 24.

191 Interview 70.

also little incentive to maintain tanks which are to be handed over to another regiment; crews cannot take pride in their tanks and their maintenance. Consequently, inordinate amounts of time are spent maintaining and fixing the vehicles. On one recent exercise, three Challengers 2s out of fourteen tanks broke down very early in an exercise, a short distance from their workshops. The exercise was, therefore, pointless. Finally, the regiment wasted much time preparing and receiving tanks for handover; the regiment I visited estimated 360 hours a month.[192]

The poor resourcing of the Royal Armoured Corps wastes valuable time. Instead of training and building unit cohesion, personnel spent much of their time in the tank park, fixing vehicles. Poor resourcing actively undermined the regiment's ability to build integrated teams. Whole Fleet Management, therefore, materially undermines the ethos of the regiments. Tanks are not simply bits of equipment to these units. They become an integral part of the regiment, invested with identity, and meaning. Crews rely on their tanks to fight in battle; their performance depends on the crews' mutual faith in their tanks. A tank regiment is its people and its equipment - and the quality of the tanks is a sign of collective regimental pride. They take on a personality of their own signifying troop, squadron and regimental identity. Under Whole Fleet Management, it is impossible to maintain this pride. Whole Fleet Management therefore undermines operational effectiveness because it degrades the performance of these regiments and the bonds within and between crews, troops and squadrons. In the end, the poor resourcing of the British Army and its armoured regiments in particular is directly relevant to the question of female integration because the Royal Armoured Corps is the combat arm which has recruited by far the highest number of females. Their successful professional integration relies on the creation of cohesive combat teams. Yet, Whole Fleet Management vitiates the formation of these teams: 'The fleet is broken. We are unable to practice as we fight because of our vehicles'.[193]

Excellent equipment does not of course in and of itself guarantee that females will be accepted as equals; there are many examples of cohesive, excellently equipped forces in the past which excluded or discriminated against women. However, today in a fully integrated force, the poor resourcing of the British Army

192 Interview 13.

193 Interview 15.

impedes unit cohesion and, therefore, precisely because teams are not as united as they should, it does not facilitate the acceptance of women.

Indeed, because resourcing is so poor, some units cannot practice some skills, they have already introduced extrinsic criteria for promotion. This was not entirely due to inadequate resourcing but also because so few promotions were available. Consequently, rather than just promoting on the basis of professional performance, these regiments promote on the basis of a wider non-military portfolio. For instance, soldiers in the unit have to organise charity work or other administrative work.[194] Predictably, personnel complained bitterly both about the arbitrariness of the system and the fact that it was, therefore, open to favouritism. It seems difficult to believe that a properly resourced unit, all of whose personnel could train on its equipment, would resort to such a system.

The Army's resourcing may seem irrelevant to the question of female integration. It isn't. Because female integration relies on the creation of coherent teams, poor resourcing becomes an issue. Male and female soldiers cannot develop their skills and team cohesion with platforms with which to train. They cannot prove their competence to their colleagues. This is not ideal for men, but it is pernicious for females who are already disadvantaged by the coding of the Army.

194 Interview 27.

Chapter 9

Training and Standards

Ambiguity about the Army's mission, overstretching due to a lack of prioritization and the promotion system, and inadequate resourcing have all undermined unit cohesion in the Army. It has been very difficult to generate robust, professional, teams as a result of all the pressure on personnel. All of these factors are then relevant to the question of the female experience, and its remedy. However, training, and the standards it inculcates, is of, perhaps, greatest significance to the question of female integration. Of course, training and standards have always been central to the Army, and they remain the fundamental basis of cohesion and performance in the British Army: 'Training is the way you improve capability and create teams'.[195] A unit is often little more than the reflection of its training. Training is a constitutive practice which defines a unit. Soldiers were well aware of the close connection between training and a unit's culture: 'The antidote to bad morale is good training'.[196] Training is a fundamental part of British Army culture. It must therefore be critical to any analysis of the female experience and any recommendation for its improvement.

9.1 Training

Traditionally, the British Army has trained very well – and very hard. It has been a point of pride; and a central part of its professional culture. It has some challenging areas in which to train, such as Dartmoor, the Brecon Beacons and Otterburn, and will train in all conditions. There is a telling aphorism in the British Army: 'If it is not raining, it is not training'. Many NATO allies have been impressed not only by the robustness of British Army training, but its realism. The British Army conducts live firing exercises on open ranges that few allies would countenance. The result has been that the British Army has recurrently produced tough, capable and resilient units. However, few doubt the remarkable ability of British troops on the ground to endure and operate in extreme circumstances. Despite everything, British troops

195 Interview 46.

196 Interview 47.

were never overrun in Al Amarah, Basra or Helmand. As soldiers themselves repeatedly emphasised, they were able to endure because of their training. It was also very noticeable that female soldiers in these theatres also observed that because of the intense training and challenging operational conditions, they felt integrated into their units more than at any other time in their careers. Training had disciplined and tempered the force. It had also consequently incorporated proven female personnel into units. Females were not distinguished as different, still less as inferior. They became as integral to performance as their male colleagues. Training then is vital for the British Army and its culture. It may offer the best route for female integration.

There is little doubt that some excellent training still goes on in the Army. There are pockets of collective training excellence. Unsurprisingly, 16 Air Assault Brigade, as the Army's high readiness forces, has been exemplary here. It has conducted not just physically challenging combined arms training but genuinely innovative, adversarial training. For instance, on an exercise in Kenya, 3 PARA were 'undone by a Hannibal team [Opposition Force]' (from 2 PARA). The Hannibal Team went online and created fake tinder accounts. From the pillow talk that these accounts generated they discovered where and when the drop would occur: 'It was shocking to reveal how the lance corporals of 2 PARA had harvested stuff off tinder'.[197]

3 PARA subsequently got their revenge. On Wessex Storm, 2 PARA used Unmanned Aerial Systems to try and target their opponent's long-range artillery. 3 PARA worked out that the Un-manned Aerial Systems (UAS) must be communicating to 2 PARA's HQ, feeding it data. Consequently, they found the UAS and, from there, were able to locate the HQ. More recently, the Parachute Regiment has been experimenting with the use of mortars in urban areas. The British Army is currently giving troops the freedom to come off its doctrinal base and to experiment. As one senior officer noted: 'That is awesome. It was created in the last two years'.[198] When units do demanding training, they relish it: 'Wessex Storm – that was the only time we fired in blokes. It was good training. We were 250 metres from the

197 Interview 46.

198 Interview 46.

rounds. Exercises on that scale are good'.[199] Robust training of infantry companies continues: 'The training the Army gets is platinum'.[200]

However, although the best training in the Army is very high quality, many personnel expressed deep concern with the quality and quantity of training units generally receive. The concerns were expressed at the very top of the organisation. Even while praising training, an officer noted very significant shortfalls: 'What kills us is that there is no artillery ammunition'. The officer listed a series of other problems. The fundamental issue was that 'activity is the first thing that is cut'.[201] Short of budget, training is the easiest thing to cancel. While officers recognised that the training that happened was good, it was delivered to only a tiny proportion of the force: 'Less than 10 per cent get collective training'.[202] Even worse, much of the training which the Army conducts is regarded by troops as inadequate. This has had a serious effect on personnel: 'It undermines belief when you do rubbish, contrived training'.[203]

16 Air Assault Brigade are advantaged in the training they do. However, in other elements of the army, the training becomes progressively weaker. It is particularly noticeable that training of the Army's heavier elements, especially its armoured and heavy artillery regiments, especially AS-90 regiments, was regarded as very poor by personnel in those units. An officer at an artillery regiment claimed: 'There is no genuine combined arms training'.[204] The guns were simply moved a short distance into well-known positions onto Salisbury Plain or other areas for an exercise to fire off a few shells. The training was unrealistic and unchallenging. There was no ability to practice the 'system of systems' which is so central to modern artillery. Indeed, another officer described the training which the artillery conducted today not as genuine combined arms training at all; it was no more than a 'fire power demonstration'.[205] Proving the point, 1 Artillery Brigade only passed 12 per cent of its tests on an exercise in 2020 due to a lack of equipment and

199 Interview 75.

200 Interview 8.

201 Interview 46.

202 Interview 8.

203 Interview 47.

204 Interview 38.

205 Interview 80.

preparedness among personnel. Yet, the Army did not seem to take that egregious failure seriously.

The problem with armoured training might be even more pronounced than the artillery. The Royal Armoured Corps is still suffering from the loss of British Army Training Unit Suffield (BATUS) in Canada. Exercises at BATUS had their limitations; they were probably not urbanised enough. However, the training at BATUS was very demanding and realistic. It involved live firing and manoeuvre in a difficult environment at scale. Although it was carefully administered, it was dangerous; over the decades some British service-personnel have been killed during training at BATUS. This is deeply regrettable, but it demonstrates the intensity of the training armoured regiments once received. One officer described how, when he had commanded an armoured unit, he had shaken hands with his subordinates before the start of the exercises, as if it were an operation. BATUS is not a real operation; it is not war-fighting. However, BATUS was the closest the British Army was able to get to it. It was demanding, difficult and, ultimately, potentially frightening and uncertain experience. The armoured regiments felt the loss of BATUS keenly: 'We have lost BATUS. It is sad. It was the only place where as a professional officer you could stretch your wings'.[206]

Since losing BATUS, personnel in the armoured regiments have conducted artificial and inadequate training: 'The fleet is broken. We are unable to practice as we fight because of our vehicles. We are not training as hard or as well as we should'.[207] Salisbury Plain has proved no substitute for the loss of BATUS; 'Salisbury Plain Training Area is not big enough. It is over-familiar and more constrained. BATUS was expansive, you could manoeuvre'.[208] It is also often difficult for units to book training areas. One armoured regiment observed that they were at Level 7 in terms of priority for training areas. Personnel complained bitterly that this was lower than the Combined Cadet Force.[209] In addition, not only were training areas and exercise scenarios inadequate for armour but the bureaucracy around clearing training, and an excessive concern with risk and safety had further vitiated training:

206 Interview 13

207 Interview 15.

208 Interview 13.

209 Interview 14.

‘There is risk aversion’.[210] Morale in the armoured corps and heavy artillery has suffered badly as skills have eroded: ‘When we get the space and time to train, we are professional. But when we have to explain to soldiers, “It is what it is” [i.e. plainly inadequate training but it is all we have], you feel unprofessional. You do your job, but you feel unprofessional’.[211] Poor training undermines any pride in the profession of arms. At the moment, training in the Army is not hard enough. It is not testing units and, therefore, in the absence of operations, personnel have lost a sense of purpose. Unit cohesion and competence has suffered. Indeed, the situation is even worse than this. The exercise schedule for most units in the British Army was punishing. In places, units were struggling to cope. Yet, because the exercises themselves were so weak and unrealistic, they could not see the value of the training. It was not improving the unit.

9.2. Standards

Unfortunately, personnel in the Army were concerned not only about training. They were deeply worried about professional standards. Many personnel decried a clear decline in military skills, fitness and basic discipline. It is very easy for older generations to dismiss young ones as softer and weaker than they were. In the 1990s, Cold War warriors often claimed that the British Army had gone soft. Yet, its personnel drawn from Generation Z endured in Basra and Helmand as well as any before them. Great caution must be exercised with assertions about the younger generation and its putative failings.

Nevertheless, during this research, there was widespread concern expressed about a decline in basic standards in the Army. Some of this was a product of Covid. During Covid, the Army had been forced to take more candidates ranked as C and D categories in their recruitment tests.[212] These were individuals which would rarely have been accepted into the Army in the past. It is hoped it is a temporary aberration. Moreover, during Covid, much training at the Army Training Centres had

210 Interview 15.

211 Interview 14.

212 Interview 66.

to be delivered virtually or under trying conditions. Training suffered. Nevertheless, although Covid has amplified the situation, many individuals complained about a general decline in standards. Interestingly, the most vociferous plaintiffs here were not officers or senior non-commissioned officers, but corporals and privates. Although these individuals were close in age to the soldiers about whom they were complaining, they were most affected by their poor standards. Corporals, in particular, had to manage ill-disciplined and poorly trained soldiers every day. One corporal who had trained recruits at Pirbright noted that the decline in standards had preceded Covid by two years; he thought that 2018 was the change.[213]

Training standards were seen to have dropped in numerous ways. However, interviewees for this study focused on the basic role fitness test, mainly because it is a simple, entry-level test where the decline in standards can be seen most clearly. In the past, all soldiers in the British Army had to run 1.5 miles in 10:30. That is no longer the case. The new standard is that soldiers must run 2 kilometres in 13:30.[214] As many noted, soldiers are being given more time to run a shorter distance. Indeed, one soldier joked that the pace required for passing this new test was equivalent to a pensioner chasing a bus, rather than actually running.[215] Two seniors in the sample observed that when they started their military careers as teenagers, they were always at the front of runs. When the unit did a fitness test, they finished first or close to it. Disappointingly, nearly twenty years later, they found themselves still at the front of these runs.[216]

It was also difficult to fail personnel. One trainer at an Army Training Centre (ATC) noted that she was responsible for a recruit who was in Week 26 of training but had failed the basic fitness test three times.[217] Male personnel widely believed that the decline in standards was due to the requirement to increase the numbers of females in the Army. This may or may not be the case. However, a number of interviewees suggested that the re-calibration of standards had precipitated a general erosion of military standards: ‘The fitness is terrible now because of the

213 Interview 29.

214 Interview 63.

215 Interview 56.

216 Interview 25.

217 Interview 62.

reform. They have reduced the standard of fitness to let women in, but the men fail now as well'.[218] The fitness standard is a small but concrete metric of decline. In addition to fitness standards, interviewees noted that various field tests, passing which had once been compulsory, had been abandoned entirely or were had become optional. It was possible for a soldier not to complete what would have been a test in the past, but still be passed as qualified: 'The standard has become an option'.[219] Interviewees noted the profound change in what a standard now meant in the army: 'Ten years ago, you had to fit your attitude to the Army, not the Army fits in with your personal needs'.[220]

In addition, there are soldiers in the Field Army who are not fully trained. Interviewees were distraught at this development. In some cases, soldiers have not completed their training but have still been passed out from Phase 1 and Phase 2 training. It is presumed that the units will provide the necessary remedial training. In many cases, because the units are overstretched, the remedial training never happens. In other cases, they have been sent to their units but are waiting to go onto their Phase 2 or Phase 3 training. Even 16 Air Assault Brigade, the best trained and resourced formation in the British Army, reported this problem. Unlike the rest of the Field Army, the units in 16 Air Assault Brigade have a full force; they have enough personnel. Yet, in fact, even here there is a lack of fully trained personnel in the technical support units: 'There are training deficits. Phase 2 expect units to train people and then they get here but we don't have enough time to train them'.[221]

Intimately related to the decline in physical and professional standards is a more general erosion of basic military discipline and respect. It was all the more telling that corporals and privates articulated this concern the most, since they work mostly closely with the incoming cohorts and are from the same generation. Corporals at one unit reported that it was difficult to maintain discipline and that privates coming straight out of training lacked courtesy and respect. They ignored rank and used inappropriate terminology:

218 Interview 75.

219 Interview 16.

220 Interview 63, 29.

221 Interview 52.

> If they saw two stripes, they would call us ‘mate’.[222]
>
> They do not respect the full screw. A private will challenge you and you can’t do anything.[223]
>
> When I went through training, I respected my bombardier. Now it “All right, mate” – not “Bombardier”.[224]
>
> The younger generation has no discipline. When I joined, we were going to war, you were going on Herrick and Telic.[225]

There are currently few operations to enforce discipline and show why it is so necessary. Indeed, at one regiment, a lance-corporal described a situation in which he had been verbally challenged to a fight when he gave a soldier an order. The soldier had squared up and shouted: ‘Come on then’.[226] Personnel recorded the difference in attitude. One Physical Training Instructor reported a story about the absence of a soldier. The soldier had missed Physical Training because his uniform was wet: his mother had failed to wash it on time.[227] So, he had simply not paraded on time. It was a trivial case. Yet, Non-Commissioned Officers reported that a ‘lazy mentality’ had crept in. For instance, orders were not read for no reason: ‘A few years ago, it never happened’.[228] Clearly, this experience was not universal in the Army. They tend to be less common in the combat arms, especially in the infantry, and there was no suggestion of such attitudes in the Parachute Regiment. However, there was a very widespread feeling among corporals (OR-2) that discipline and respect has been eroded.

Not only did young soldiers often lack basic respect for their junior leaders but corporals and sergeants found it increasingly difficult to enforce good order and discipline upon them. One corporal reported an incident when he had reprimanded a soldier only to be warned ‘Now you’re stressing me’. He concluded: ‘The snowflake

222 Interview 29.
223 Interview 29.
224 Interview 37.
225 Interview 57.
226 Interview 29.
227 Interview 29.
228 Interview 37.

generation is waiting to be offended and to report you'.[229] Consequently, 'people were too scared to tell people off'.[230] It is very important to note that male personnel were very concerned about reprimanding female personnel. They claimed they failed to enforce standards because they were worried about receiving complaints for bullying or harassment from females: 'All they need to say is that the instructor bullied me; he said this'.[231] Other Non-Commissioned Officers did not feel they could shout at females, as they might at a male soldier.[232] Draconian, unthinking discipline is clearly out of place in a modern army. Yet, the evidence from the interviews suggests that alongside the decline of collective combined arms training, there has been a general erosion of standards, discipline and attitude. As one trainer noted: 'The recruits now have the steering wheel'.[233]

There is little excuse for inadequate training. As General Douglas MacArthur stated: 'There is no other profession where the penalties for employing untrained personnel are so appalling or so irrevocable as in the military'. Since Operation Herrick, the training regime in the British Army has corroded, through a lack of resourcing, focus and effort. Some standards have been altered for good operational reasons. In other cases, such as the lowering of fitness standards, it may be that the policy of increasing female pass rates has been at work. This is noble goal, if it is true. However, ironically, the effect has been the opposite. Firstly, it has not advanced the case for female credibility because females are associated with a decline in standards. As many soldiers emphasised; they were not opposed to females joining any part of the Army, including the infantry. However, standards had to be maintained and they had to be the same for men and women.[234] The reduction of standards simply confirmed their male view of the effect of females. Secondly, the drop in military standards has been correlated closely with and may have even partly caused an erosion of respect and discipline. This corrosion of good order and discipline is unlikely to be beneficial to females. If the Army cannot discipline its soldiers so that they automatically call their corporals by the appropriate appellation,

229 Interview 29.

230 Interview 29.

231 Interview 63.

232 Interview 18.

233 Interview 62.

234 Interview 49.

it seems unlikely it will be able to encourage its increasingly diverse soldiers to treat their female colleagues respectfully. If poor male behaviour is indeed attributable to the civilian cultures from which its soldiers derive, the Army must be able to discipline its recruits and soldiers fairly but firmly; it must be able to re-educate its recruits. Just as it must be able to teach them to march properly, so must it be robust and confident enough to enforce professional military standards, which, of course, includes the equal treatment of females. No one has been helped by the decline in training and standards.

Of course, as Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2., and Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3., clarified, while standards need to be enhanced, to integrate teams and to build cohesion, a single professional standard, recognised and enforced by everyone, is required. Females need to be subject to the same standards as males. All secondary informal testing for female and for any other soldier needs to be eliminated.

9.3. Barrack Life

In addition to professional standards, some interlocutors in this study expressed concern about a decline in standards in Army Barracks. It was felt that a sense of community was eroding to the detriment of cohesion and ethos: ‘Single rooms are a mistake. It strips that ethos away – it is not being part of a team’.[235] In the last decade, the Army has moved to campus style, single-room accommodation. This has been welcomed by many young soldiers and they enjoyed the privacy it gave them. However, single-room accommodation has generated some problems. It is potentially isolating for soldiers. Indeed, in one focus group, a soldier explained that he liked to shut his door after a day’s work and be on his own.[236] His attitude seemed antithetical to the Army’s ethos. One minority soldier said he did not want to share a room with his Fijian colleague because he suggested soldiers of that ethnicity tended to snore loudly.[237] In an increasingly diverse force, single room accommodation can threaten small unit cohesion. Soldiers are atomised by it. There have been a number of suicides in the Army recently. The causes of these tragic cases will be complex,

235 Interview 39.

236 Interview 40.

237 Interview 40.

but soldiers themselves identified the isolation of barracks as a potential factor.[238] In single rooms, short work-days and Friday afternoon stand-downs, junior soldiers can spend very little time with their colleagues.

It was very noticeable that while soldiers approved of single accommodation, they did also report that when they have been in shared accommodation in training, they had enjoyed it. It has been a more collegial, amusing environment.[239] Other soldiers, who had experienced Germany, regretted the move back to the UK. In Germany, the garrison had been very sociable. Because soldiers were all stationed there together, they had spent evenings and especially weekends socialising with each other. Unit identity had been stronger; and individuals in it happier.[240]

It will probably be impossible for the Army to return its junior soldiers to shared accommodation. It is unlikely to be welcomed by soldiers. The problems of dormitories are evident; while they foster cohesion, they can also encourage deviant, extreme behaviour. Yet, the Army should make every effort to encourage a positive barrack culture even in single room blocks. In the best units, this was already evident. The blocks operated with an open-door policy. Doors were always open and although soldiers slept alone, they actually lived together. Surprisingly, soldiers in these blocks relished Covid because they were given the time and freedom to socialise together freely. The Army might go further. Officers' and Sergeants' messes already exist. Should the army provide similar messes for juniors and for soldiers? The Army might install bars or communal spaces on camp for its soldiers. This has not always been as successful as might be expected. For instance, the Commanding Officer at one unit had created a bar and social space for junior soldiers on camp which they had been encouraged to use. In the event, the area was underused.[241] Consequently, rather than a space for the unit as a whole, many soldiers emphasised the importance of common rooms inside the blocks. Some units had provisioned common rooms with televisions, pool tables or table-tennis tables so that soldiers could do something together off duty.

Junior soldiers have a great deal of time to themselves. In barracks, their workday finishes early. In the best units, soldiers naturally entertain themselves in

238 Interview 40.

239 Interview 56.

240 Interview 18.

241 Interview 55.

the evenings; they engage in sports or other social events together. The Army might consider introducing a programme of activities in the evenings for its soldiers; games, sporting events, maybe lectures, lessons on military history or even just edifying films, perhaps on a military theme. It seems likely that a generally improved barrack culture might facilitate female integration. It was a small sample which cannot be taken as definitive evidence, but it was noticeable that the unit with the best barrack culture was also the one in which a female interviewer did not lock her door at night.

Females are currently accommodated in the same blocks as their male colleagues. This is correct; separation undermines integration. Females reported that when they lived in a separate block, communications were more difficult. They often failed to receive important messages.[242] In and of itself, it excluded them. Female soldiers, therefore, actively want to live in the same blocks as their male colleagues, despite the problems of door-knocking. As door-knocking has shown, female soldiers are not at significantly less risk of harassment in single rooms, than they would be in shared ones. However, single accommodation has facilitated fraternization. It is very easy for female and male soldiers to engage in consensual sex with each other. In a civilian organisation, this is not a problem (although it can encourage predatory behaviour), but in the Army it can undermine good order and discipline, if the soldiers are in the same section or platoon. It is potentially a threat to standards. The Army cannot realistically stop young people having sex with each other. However, it should consider moving soldiers quickly if they develop a relationship.

In addition, females reported that lewd comments were often made about them in blocks as they went to the showers. This made them feel uncomfortable and encouraged many to wear concealing clothes when walking the corridors. It would be very difficult to police blocks for this kind of harassment, but it should be an object of attention.

The Army needs to reinforce its professional standards. Soldiers believe that training, exercises, military discipline and self-discipline all need to improve. There is a danger that by focusing on formal military skills, the Army forgets the importance of barrack culture. The barracks may be as significant for standards and discipline as the parade ground. In order to advance its military professionalism, the Army might

242 Interview 64.

also look to improve the informal culture of its barracks. Barrack culture should reinforce the Army's standards values and standards, actively contributing to the creation of cohesive teams, in which females are an integral part. At present, in some units, the culture of the barracks is left too much to chance.

A general renovation and re-invigoration of professional military standards in training, on exercises and in barracks may be the best way to enhance the professionalism of the British Army. It is also likely to be the most effective way of integrating female personnel.

Chapter 10

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Atherton Report raised a central question: How will the Army integrate females more successfully to improve their experiences? This Audit of Army Culture has tried to answer that question by exploring the British Army in depth, ranging across a wide range of practices. Based on its findings, this Audit identifies a central problem for women in the Army today, in that the Army is currently coded male, primarily because about 90 per cent of its personnel are men. This has generated a series of practices which recurrently and routinely disadvantage female personnel. They are often accidentally marginalised. Sometimes the discrimination is more purposeful. Females are frequently the target of predation which ranges from the relatively benign to the criminal.

To overcome the gender coding, which lies at the heart of the Army's problems, the government has decreed that the armed forces should recruit 30 per cent female service-personnel by 2030. This demographic change has worked in civilian organisations. Yet, it is almost inconceivable that the Army will ever get close to this figure. Consequently, other reforms are required to alter Army culture and to integrate females more fully. They have been laid out in this report.

Some reforms relate to specific practices of discrimination; language, door-knocking etc. However, this Audit maintains that the integration of females might be best advanced by a wider-ranging approach. Ultimately, improving the experience of females involves a detailed reform and renovation of the Army. The Army needs to become more professional. The male coding of the Army might overcome best, by re-coding the Army as a professional military organisation, rather than a masculine one. I propose ten actionable recommendations to achieve this end. The recommendations are organised into two programmes of reform - enhancing professionalism and advancing female integration. Both are equally important and interdependent. They represent two threads of a unified programme. In the case of improving barrack culture, the recommendations apply equally to improving the female experience and enhancing professionalism. I have numbered and lettered individual reforms to demonstrate their parity.

10.1. Recommendations

This Audit proposes ten recommendations. They are listed below numerically and alphabetically. Defining the Army's purpose (Recommendation 1) will be essential, because it will provide the boundary conditions for every other reform. However, the numbering and lettering should not be taken as an absolute scale of importance. The recommendations represent an integrated set of proposals. Rather I have ordered the recommendations to identify reforms which could be affected most rapidly and those like the promotion system which are likely to take longer. The recommendations are tabulated at the end of the section to highlight their interconnection.

10.1.1. Enhancing Professionalism

1. Define a Purpose

Future Soldier is an eloquent document. It identifies war-fighting as the Army's prime function. This is surely correct. However, in the light of the confusion of personnel, the Army may need to define precisely how it will fight more clearly. It may need to articulate not just a broad function, but a precise mission: a purpose. In the light of the War in Ukraine, the defence of the Baltics may have become an imperative.

At present the Futures Directorate and Direct Land Warfare are working closely together to develop a coherent, deliverable doctrine for the immediate future. They are currently working on a concept of urban defence immediately applicable to the NATO mission. The mass of British ground forces will be situated in fortified defensive positions, which they will defend furiously, while the enemy is attritted in the deep with strikes and raids. The Futures Directorate is excited about the potential of this concept and are trying to develop an innovative exercising programme to support it. The concept seems to match NATO strategic requirements, the Army's current resourcing and its traditional strengths at low level tactics.

Of course, the Army does not have to adopt a doctrine of urban defence. Other missions might be possible. So long as they provide a unifying purpose, it is up to the Army to decide. However, the urban defence concept is important primarily because it provides the Army with a precise concrete mission for the first time since Afghanistan and perhaps since the end of the Cold War. The Army can unite around

this mission. It can provide direction to every single soldier in the British Army so each understands their role in the mission. The mission will help in solidifying standards in the Army because it will become totally clear what units need their soldiers to do; the mission will provide objective criteria of performance. Finally, it may enthuse soldiers. They may start once again to take pride in the profession of arms, which has eroded in the last decade. The Army can do lots of things; but it needs one unifying purpose.

2. Prioritize

The Army must prioritise. At 73,000, it cannot deliver all the functions it did when it was 120,000 strong. It must eliminate some commitments, however politically beneficial they might be, and focus on its core mission – whether that is urban defence or another mission set. Clearly, as the Covid Pandemic recedes, this will become easier. Yet, with such a small force, the Army will probably need to concentrate more coherently and sustainably on its NATO commitments in the Baltics. The Army will be judged on its ability to deter and, if necessary, defeat Russian land forces. If the army is going to be able to build cohesive capable professional units for this core mission, the Army needs to devolve itself of other military tasks. It needs to reduce its aspirations in terms of functions and geography. It may also have to scale back or even refuse certain UK resilience commitments. Certainly, the increasing habit of government to use the Army as a reserve pool of labour for various domestic tasks, some of which might be defined as political, should ideally be reduced. The effect on unit cohesion and operational effectiveness is severe; political masters must be aware of this cost. The Army will of course stand by to support civilian authorities, but only in crisis. Even then, some resilience tasks might need to be fulfilled by the Reserves. Even as it prioritises its core mission, the British Army should be held to the highest standards in its delivery – including the integration of females into military units.

3. Enhance Training and Standards

Training is absolutely central to the Army's culture. Combat arms training at unit level and above needs to be improved to enhance a rigorous, but inclusive, culture of professionalism. This will foster unit cohesion and pride; it will help integrate all

personnel who are seen as an intrinsic and valuable part of the time. At the same time, standards of fitness, skill and discipline need to be tautened.

Improved training and standards are fundamental to the creation of cohesive teams, in which females are integrated. They are, therefore, a decisive mechanism for the improvement of the female experience in the Army. Many male soldiers in this study professed that they were completely content with females in the Army and the combat arms, if they reached the standard. Their opposition to females stemmed from the fact that some women they had seen were not good soldiers. Standards were everything; integration is predicated upon it. In the event, as we have seen, there were other obstacles than even competent women faced. Yet, even so, these obstacles do not deny the fact that in a professional force, training standards are critical to the integration of females. In some cases, the slackening of standards has been disadvantageous to females since they can no longer prove their worth. In other cases, they are blamed for the lowering of standards. A re-invigorated training programme may be the best way to re-code the Army from being male, to being just military.

However, even though the Army needs better training and higher standards, this may actually help women to integrate. The Army needs to set the standards it requires for operational performance. All females who pass the standard should accepted. Double standards for women must be eliminated.

4. Align Resourcing

The Army is currently recapitalising its fleet. This is long overdue, but it is much welcomed. The Army needs to retire its old vehicles and equipment as soon as possible and to re-invest in new, better materiel. This will not be easy within the budget. The Army needs to match its aspirations to its actual resourcing. In the event, it is likely that the Army may have to concentrate its resources on a smaller, capable war-fighting element: perhaps 16 Air Assault Brigade and two mechanised brigades configured for urban defence. This concentration might also reduce the workload in terms of maintenance and reduce the tempo of exercising, which is currently stressing the Army. It would seem preferable to have a small deliverable force which is credible, rather than stretching and exaggerating capabilities.

5. Adapt the Promotion System

The promotions system has been institutionalised for a long time. It is difficult to reform it and the reporting system is not self-evidently flawed. However, to overcome the pathologies of the two-year appointment cycle, three reforms might be considered. Firstly, above the rank of major, the Army might experiment with longer postings of three or four years, especially in specialist staff jobs, to ensure continuity.

Secondly, the Army might introduce an 'eyes officer 'system. When he was commander of the British 2nd Army and, then, the 21st Army Group, General Montgomery appointed a number of junior officers who were tasked to monitor the performance of units and report directly to him. In order to re-connect senior leadership with its people, the Chief of the General Staff or Commander Field Army might secretly appoint a small selection of officers and senior NCOs to report directly to them on the actual condition of the Army and the command climate in specific units. The promotion of poor leaders would still be possible but senior leadership would have a better understanding of their subordinates' character and skills. It would be useful to align appointments with skills and experience more systematically.

Finally, because it is so busy, senior leadership in the army is sometimes detached from its personnel and from the reality of the Field Army. Indeed, one officer described senior leadership as 'stratospherically detached from the Field Army'.[243] As a result, some of their recent reprimands about the behaviour of soldiers had seemed as little more than 'virtue-signalling'.[244] It would be hugely beneficial if the senior leaders in the Army, the Chief of the General Staff and the Commander Field Army, were more present and visible to soldiers in the Army – and knew their subordinate commanders better. Rather than staged, formal visits, it might be more beneficial if senior leaders spent more time with their forces informally as they trained and exercised.

243 Interview 35.

244 Interview 35.

10.1.2. Advancing Integration

a. Reform Communications

One of the most obvious though mundane forms of male coding in the Army is language and, above all, appellations. Inappropriate terms like ‘chapess’ and ‘ladies’ need to be eliminated as were racist epithets before them. At the same time, a new lexicon which does not discriminate against women needs to be institutionalised. WhatsApp needs to be eliminated as a medium of communication; it has become a prime mechanism of predation. If necessary, a digital messaging tool is needed where soldiers’ personal contact details remain hidden. Educating soldiers about the contribution of female service-personnel on recent operations might also help to counter presumptions that females are less capable than males. For instance, on Operation Pitting, female service-personnel performed a crucial role on the frontline.

b. Zero Tolerance for Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment

The Army currently has a zero-tolerance policy for drug use. Soldiers who fail a compulsory drugs test are automatically dismissed from the Army. Their good conduct and previous service are irrelevant. The Army refuses to countenance drug use. In the light of the Army’s policy towards drugs, it was surprising to find that many females who had been subjected to predatory behaviour (like door-knocking) or even outright sexual assault reported that the culprits had not been punished or were still in the Army. Females rightly called for a zero-tolerance policy. At present, the Army is effectively suggesting that drug use (which might involve soft drugs or occur infrequently or recreationally on the weekend or on leave) is a greater threat to discipline and cohesion, than the abuse of female colleagues on base, exercises or operations. This seems to be a strange, if not contradictory standard. Certainly, it seems to affirm the belief of females that they are not regarded as fully part of the army; they are, indeed, ‘second class citizens’. It would seem essential to bring in a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, discrimination and harassment of females. Not every soldier who is guilty of predatory behaviour should be thrown immediately out of the Army, but all convicted culprits should be properly punished in accordance with the seriousness of their offence. A soldier guilty of a sexual assault must be dismissed. Bullying, discrimination, harassment and sexual assault are in clear breach of good order and military discipline; they undermine unit cohesion and morale. They must be punished accordingly.

c. Foster Inclusion

Until February 2022, the Army had assured inclusivity principally through MATT 6. There was little evidence it contributed much to inclusivity. In response to the Atherton Report, the Chief of the General Staff developed a programme called *Operation Teamwork*. For the units, which invested in the day and conducted events as they were intended by the Chief of the General Staff, it was a hugely valuable experience. The success of *Operation Teamwork* at those units, which invested in it, would suggest that the Army might institutionalise 'culture days' like this much more widely. The Army needs to be inclusive – actively.

d. Strengthen the D&I Architecture

The complaints system for women has certainly been inadequate in the past. It was a major topic in the Atherton report which rightly insisted on the overhaul of the system.[245] It was also the topic in a recent *Economist* report.[246] There have been important reforms of the system so that complaints are now handled independently, and not by the chain of command which might be implicated in the abuse and might have every interest in covering it up. The fact that there has been an increase in the number of complaints in the last 12 months may suggest, not that the problem of sexual harassment has actually worsened, but that the system is now more efficient and females now trust it more.[247] At unit level, the formal complaint procedure was generally thought adequate by females involved in this study, though it was a last resort. Consequently, females had used it more reluctantly than they might. However, there was a manifest lack of Diversity and Inclusion representatives. In some units, the D&I team were unknown or did not exist; in others, there were insufficient trained personnel to perform the role. There were not enough D&I allies and partners.[248] Good D&I teams offer early warning to problems and can offer informal resolution to complaints. It is therefore recommended that the D&I architecture is thickened from the unit level to Army HQ.

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245 House of Commons Defence Committee *Protecting those who Protect Us*.

246 Isobel Thompson 'The Family Secret; how rape is hushed up in the British Army' https://www.economist.com/interactive/1843/2022/04/28/the-family-secret-british-army-abuse

247 Interview 10; Executive Committee of the Army Board 10 November 2021.

248 Interviews 32, 77.

e. Enrich Barrack Culture

The Army has moved to campus style, single-room accommodation. This has been welcomed by many young soldiers and they enjoyed the privacy it gave them. However, single-room accommodation has generated some problems. It is potentially isolating for soldiers. In order to ensure values and standards, to foster inclusion and to build better professional teams, the Army might look to improve barrack culture, creating a positive communal environment in single block accommodation.

	Enhancing Professionalism		**Advancing Integration**
1.	Define a Purpose	a.	Reform Communications
2.	Prioritize	b.	Zero Tolerance for BDH
3.	Improve Training and Standards	c.	Foster Inclusivity
4.	Align Resourcing	d.	Strengthen D&I Architecture
5.	Adapt the Promotion System	e.	Enrich Barrack Culture

Table 2: Recommendations: Summary

10.2. Conclusion

The findings of this Report will not make happy reading for many serving personnel in the Army. Senior leaders may challenge some claims. There is no requirement for everyone to agree with all the analysis and proposals. The recommendations are proposed as suggestions, not as diktats. It is up to the Army to decide how best to reform itself as an organisation. It should be emphasised that though this report is critical in places, its purposes is affirmative.

The Army is an indispensable public institution. It is vital to the defence of this country and its national and international interests. The Army is still a highly capable organisation which has proved itself recurrently on recent operations. However, to

sustain its traditions and to remain the force it wants to be, and if the testimony of some 500 soldiers is to be believed, it seems clear that major reforms are necessary. Under current leadership, some of these renovations have already begun. The Army is addressing its culture; it is taking female integration seriously. This report proposes only that these already initiated changes are accelerated, widened, and deepened. As one officer observed: 'The hierarchy needs to go bold. Sacrificial cows need to be slaughtered'.[249]

Just as it did after the Boer War, the Army now needs to seize this moment to renovate itself. It needs to address the experience of women systematically. To do that it needs to integrate and build its teams. If Army leadership fails to act now, the future of the Army seems uncertain. However, if the leadership can exploit its current predicament, the Army may be able to re-invigorate itself as a force which is as capable as any of its predecessors. In order to become an inclusive, capable, force for the twenty-first century, which harnesses the potential of all its people, the Army needs to re-professionalise itself. It needs to enhance its professional ethos, reinforce its training and standards, and advance its skills and expertise. It has been accused of being a hyper-masculine organisation in the past. It needs to become a hyper-professional organisation. It needs, in short, to re-learn how to fight and win.

249 Interview 8.